**Viral Reactivation Resources—or why it can be so hard to get over covid (because it is not just covid…)**

**By Lara Vesta**

**Updated 2022**

If you are struggling with returning from an active covid infection, here are a few things I’ve been working with that have been extremely supportive in bringing me back to health.

First, it is important to know that even healthy people take weeks to recover from covid. I’ve had the virus three times, two times AFTER being vaccinated (!) and every variant has been different. The most critical piece of information for me has been to not rush my healing process.

I tested positive for Epstein Barr viral reactivation in May—this is not an active infection (IgM was negative) but a reactivation of a past infection (IgG levels were high). We only tested for Epstein Barr, but based on my history I would guess other viruses were reactivated too. In 2018 I had five viruses come back as active during my worst ME/CFS symptoms, so I knew what viral reactivation felt like. My doctor was reluctant to test, even though viral reactivation is common in people with difficult covid recoveries/long covid.[[1]](#footnote-1),[[2]](#footnote-2)

I’d had symptoms of viral reactivation following my second mild covid infection in January/February.

**Symptoms of Viral Reactivation (some)**

Extreme fatigue—sleeping nine to ten hours a night and waking up tired, needing to sleep every afternoon

Joint pain in my hands, feet and hips

Low grade fevers in the afternoon (99.1-99.5)

Shaking on overexertion or when I would spend too much time upright (post-exertional malaise, orthostatic intolerance), only lying down was restorative

Brain fog

Speech aphasia

Headaches non-responsive to pain relief

**Crashes**

Pushing myself to do things caused a crash—all of the symptoms above compounded with the feeling of being hit by a truck, lots of pain, headaches, brain fog, aphasia…I had to visit my grandfather who was dying in late February, several weeks after recovering from covid and had a crash that lasted for over a month in March.

Crashes need to be avoided because they can damage the body, making it less able to heal and increasing the chances of permanent disability.

Crashes have to be controlled by rest and pacing.

**Rest and pacing for the non/newly-chronically ill**

As someone who was healthy for the first thirty-four years of my life, I am really bad at resting and pacing. Both require me to step outside of my expectations and surrender to my healing process—which comes at considerable physical, psychological and financial costs.

I’ve had to learn to modulate my behavior considerably through neural retraining. Here is my rest/pacing 101 plus some resources in the footnotes:

1. Rest both before and after every activity. Every activity, meaning eating, bathing, working, caring for children, etc. Our culture does not make space for this, but it is critical to healing. As my midwife once said to me: say yes to every bit of help offered, everything is a yes.
2. Quit an activity about 20 minutes prior to completion. For example, as I write this document I know I will be tired after about an hour, so to appropriately pace myself and not push my brain to the breaking point I will stop after about 40 minutes and rest again. This allows me to “bank” energy, and slowly builds my potential for endurance.
3. Map out activities for each day. I have to keep all activities within a two hour window, so have to choose what I will or will not be doing—I cannot do it all. By prioritizing on a calendar I can organize my days to be pretty functional while still allowing my body to heal.
4. More resources for pacing are available here. Even though they are geared to ME/CFS and Fibromyalgia, the principles apply to all energetically limiting conditions: <https://www.mefm.bc.ca/pacing-resources>

**Viral Reactivation—what it can look like, how to test for it**

My labs are ridiculously perfect. All of my CBC and liver/kidney/etc. labs are within the range of normal and have been so forever, so it is difficult for doctors to believe me when I tell them I am ill.

Viral reactivation can look like feeling really bad but with normal labs.

If you are struggling with recovery, have your doctor test for the following viruses (IgG, which shows past infection, and IgM, which indicates an active infection…high IgG levels can indicate subclinical viral reactivation):

Epstein-Barr (Mononucleosis)

Varicella (Chicken Pox)

Cytomegalovirus

Herpes Virus

Viruses can cause systemic inflammation. At Stanford they found that viral reactivation caused the increase of a specific kind of inflammatory protein, C4a. Testing these levels has been helpful for me in the past as well.

Some people are reporting viral reactivation with covid too, testing positive again without symptoms or within ninety days after an active infection. This could also be tested for…

Please note: if you live in a moldy/water damaged house (any house that has had a leaky roof or pipes, flooding, etc) you should investigate whether mold might be contributing to your immune issues. See my worksheet on mold resources for more information…

**Treating viral reactivation**

Detox—I use a portable, low EMF sauna at home and/or the dry sauna at my gym (when I am strong enough to go out). Sweating moves toxins out of my body, and that helps focus my immune ability on the task at hand—viruses out.

Gentle stretching/swimming—when I am able I use a therapy pool to take the weight off my joints and stretch.

Therapeutic Horseback Riding—I had some tremendous benefit from therapeutic riding, it really helped my neuroinflammation.

Protein--I was vegan for over a year when I first contracted covid but had to quickly change my diet once I became sick as I could no longer tolerate soy foods or processed foods. I also became anemic. High quality animal protein has been critical for my healing—for more on this I recommend the book Nourishing Traditions by Sally Fallon Morell.

Fresh, locally grown vegetables and fruits are critical to my healing, anti-inflammatory and alkalizing to the body. When I am really unwell a smoothie of fresh spinach, full fat yogurt, juice and fresh fruit is supportive and nutritious.

**Supplements**

Lauricidin—a very potent form of monolaurin that I have used for years to treat viral reactivation successfully. Begin with a small amount (1/4 tsp) and work up to 3 scoops 3x daily.

Lemon Balm—antiviral herb, I use a homemade tincture or oxymel during the day

Pro Boost Thymic Protein A—three to 4 times daily

Adaptogens—Maca and Ashwagandha have been helpful, I take them daily

Vitamin C—pure esther c, 1000 mg daily

Zinc—I like zinc losenges

Quercetin—bioflavonoid, anti-inflammatory, 500 mg daily

**Medications**

Low Dose Naltrexone has been a lifesaver for me. It reduces my inflammation, allowing my body to function better. I have also experienced no side effects with its use at all, a rarity for someone so chemically sensitive.

Antiviral Therapies—I haven’t yet started any antiviral therapy but have managed to reduce my viral load using the supplements above. But they are on deck should I need them.

**Illness as Initiation**

One of the ways I have been able to navigate over a decade of devastating physical challenges is through viewing my illnesses as rites of passage initiations, transforming me and supporting me in becoming.

If you would like to connect and learn more about illness as a rite of passage and making meaning out of difficult experiences, I offer the following.

The Wild Soul School: nonlinear, inquiry-based education for exploration. The 13 Day Ritual Practice is free, and the ongoing Dark Goddess Project is specific to rites of passage initiations. <https://wildsoulschool.teachable.com>

Patreon Community: if this work is useful to you please consider joining our support community. <https://www.patreon.com/laraveledavesta>

The Moon Divas Guidebook: Spirited Self-Care for Women in Transition has lots of resources for navigating challenging life transformations. <https://www.laravesta.co/moon-divas-guidebook>

I wish you healing and wholeness on the path.

With love—Lara

\*\*Disclaimer: please note this information is based on my personal experience and does not constitute medical advice.

1. https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34579250/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://www.news-medical.net/news/20220623/Epstein-Barr-virus-can-reactivate-in-long-COVID.aspx [↑](#footnote-ref-2)