

**Minnesota Now (MPR) | Minneapolis woman, 30, shares struggle with long COVID  
01G6694BGAHPQHH39XEH8VAFDS**

**INTERVIEWER:** One of the growing concerns of the ongoing pandemic is the number of Americans who are living with long COVID. According to the American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, more than 25 million Americans are living with lasting heart or lung problems, intense fatigue, and other symptoms months after their COVID infection. A Minneapolis woman, Savannah Brooks, is one of them.

At 30 years old she's been an athlete her whole life, but now she's living with long COVID defined by the CDC as symptoms that last more than four weeks, sometimes even months after infection. She's on the line right now to talk about what she's experiencing. Savannah, welcome to the program.

**SAVANNAH** Thank you so much.

**BROOKS:**

**INTERVIEWER:** Thank you for your time. I am really sorry to hear you're dealing with long COVID. It must be very difficult. Can you give us a sense of your symptoms and when it started?

**SAVANNAH** I caught COVID at the end of April, April 22 and I had one week of all of your classic COVID symptoms. I had a

**BROOKS:** really bad cough, sore throat, runny nose, I was nauseous, I had a bit of a fever. And then after a week all those symptoms started to clear up and I thought I was getting better.

A week after that, so two weeks, after I got COVID I was going for a walk with my boyfriend and made it about four or five blocks and had to sit down or I was going to faint. And he had to carry me home. And it took about 45 minutes for me to be able to support my own weight again. So obviously that was pretty scary.

I reached out to my doctor about it. And in the time it took for me to get in to see a post-COVID clinic doctor it happened a couple more times. So that was a few weeks long process of trying to figure out what was actually going on, what long COVID had actually created within my body, which I have just recently found out as POTS which stands for postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome.

I have blood pressure issues. So when I'm standing up my blood pressure plummets which in turn makes my heart rate speed up really fast to try and get back to my brain and that can cause me to pass out. It causes just really severe fatigue, so at about 1:00 PM every day I'm pretty much totally wiped. And probably the hardest thing is I can't walk or stand for very long without risking passing out. So I can walk a few blocks maybe but that's about it.

**INTERVIEWER:** And before this, as I mentioned in the intro, you were an athlete.

**SAVANNAH** Yes I was. I was a boxing instructor. I haven't been doing that, obviously since I caught COVID. I've been training

**BROOKS:** in some sort of combat sport for a little over a decade. And then I started playing soccer when I was like five and played that all through high school and played lacrosse through high school. So this has been since the end of April this is probably the longest I've ever gone without some sort of physical pursuit you might say whether that be running a race or just going to the gym regularly.

**INTERVIEWER:** Wow. This has to be really hard. How are you doing mentally with this?

**SAVANNAH** It's pretty tough. For most of my life I've suffered from depression and so exercise is really how I've managed to

**BROOKS:** keep a handle on that. That was really my main coping mechanism.

That on top of not being able to exercise to alleviate some of that has definitely been hard, and I've talked to my therapist about it. It's really just a matter of finding new coping mechanisms. But when you've had a coping mechanism you've used for two decades it's hard to move on past that

**INTERVIEWER:** I'm curious, you were vaccinated in boosted, right?

**SAVANNAH** I was, yes.

**BROOKS:**

**INTERVIEWER:** And this still happened?

**SAVANNAH** Yep. I was boosted in January so it was about a four-month breakthrough. It's kind of tough because for a lot of

**BROOKS:** people, their breakthrough cases feel fairly mild, and so when I got COVID was this idea of yeah you'll probably get COVID but it's going to be fine. It'll be like having bad allergies or it'll be like a cold and then you'll be OK.

And for some people that certainly is true, but that doesn't mean that you're not going to have complications later. So it doesn't mean for POTS or POTS, like this affects my central nervous system in my heart, which are two things that you really, really don't want to be affected. And that doesn't mean it's not going to happen to other people, that they're going to have central nervous system issues or heart issues even if the week or so they have COVID seems pretty mild.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did you get satisfaction from your medical providers? Were they responsive to you when you came in with these symptoms? Did they understand what was happening or did you have to go through a battery of tests to determine yeah, this actually is long COVID?

**SAVANNAH** No, they were very responsive. And at this point a lot of the complication factors they've seen for a while. So

**BROOKS:** when I got in to a post-COVID clinic they had a lot of that research already.

I wasn't one of the very first people, which was certainly helpful. And then when I went in and saw my cardiologist similarly he was able to say, this is what we're seeing in a lot of post-COVID patients. And this is most likely what you have, and so then to test based on that.

**INTERVIEWER:** I've been talking to Dr. Michael Osterholm from the University of Minnesota actually throughout the course of the pandemic, but most recently he's been saying that he is really concerned and are other public health officials about long COVID. And the fact that so many people are developing this it's really can cause some serious potential ramifications down the road here when it comes to worker disability and that kind of thing. are you able to work at this point?

**SAVANNAH** Yeah. I work from home, and luckily I work with really, really great people. I work at the Loft Literary Center in

**BROOKS:** downtown Minneapolis. And so I can really create my own schedule. But I have pretty massively cut down on hours. And I'm planning on taking long-term disability which has been really fun to try and figure out since COVID's fairly new and all the complications from COVID.

But it's like I was saying before, like 1:00 PM, 1:00 or 2:00 PM each day it's really hard for me to think. That's when the brain fog comes back. I forget words a lot. It's really hard for me to multitask. So luckily I've been able to cut back where I'm not working very often in the afternoon. But again, that's sort of a privileged position to be in.

**INTERVIEWER:** Do you have an indication from your physicians? Do you think you'll be able to get back to some form of normalcy in some way, shape, or form in the future?

**SAVANNAH** I'm hopeful I will. The prognosis is typically a few months, so whether that's on the shorter end of it being maybe four months until I can do relative activity again or six or seven months, no one can really tell me. Researchers aren't totally sure at least from what my cardiologist was telling me why POTS starts up after COVID and then also how long it takes for people to get past it. It's really just a bunch of lifestyle changes that you're trying to reset your central nervous system into controlling your blood pressure and your heart rate correctly once more. And so how long that takes for each individual person is different.

**INTERVIEWER:** What's your message to listeners as they hear your story?

**SAVANNAH** We're all very tired of living in a pandemic and it's definitely hard. It's hard to keep masking. It's hard to stay vigilant. It's hard to not be in large groups of people.

And I certainly fell into that mindset of, I'm young. I'm really healthy. If I get COVID, it's probably going to be fine. And I was very wrong, and it really, really wasn't worth that.

Despite sounding fairly chipper and interviews, this is extremely difficult and has been extremely difficult and will continue to be extremely difficult. And nobody wants to go through it. I was incredibly healthy and had no underlying factors. And so for people who do have underlying factors this can be so much worse. This can be really, really debilitating. And I would consider only being able to walk a couple of blocks debilitating but for some people they can't even do that.

So I'd say, just as much as you can stay vigilant, certainly try. And if you do get COVID, don't be afraid to reach out to your doctors, to go in and get testing just to make sure that you don't have any of these extenuating conditions because the faster you catch them, the faster you can act on them. That can make all the difference.

**INTERVIEWER:** We'll leave it there, Savannah. We wish you well. We really hope that things improve for you. Thank you so much for sharing your story.

**SAVANNAH** Thank you for having me on.

**BROOKS:**

**INTERVIEWER:** Savannah Brooks is a Literary agent in Minneapolis. She came down with COVID back in April. She is still suffering from symptoms related to long-haul COVID.