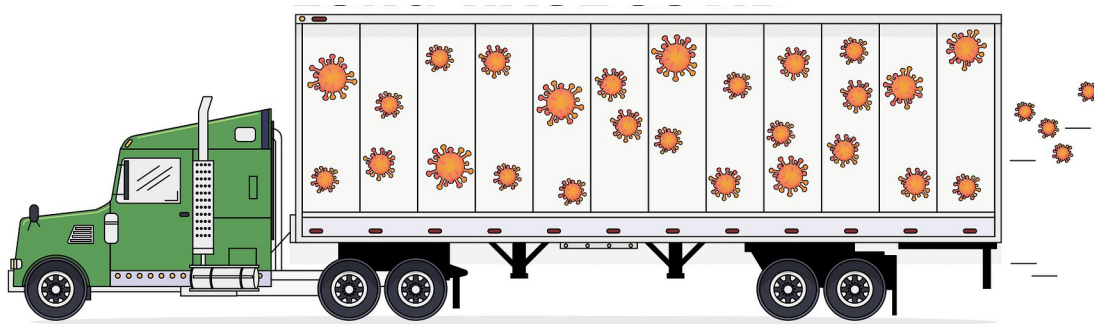




# My Survival

Juan Torrez



**BEFORE YOU READ:** What does it mean to be a Covid-19 long-hauler? Share what you know.

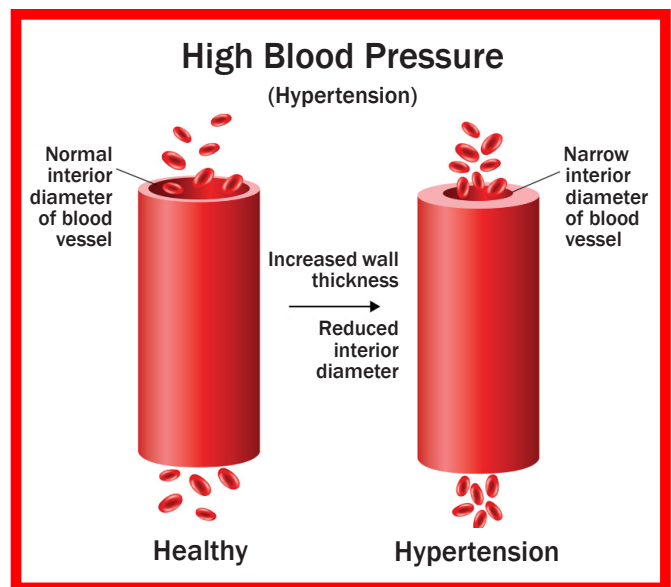
## Diagnosed with Covid

The worst experience of my life was contracting Covid and then becoming a long-hauler. I got Covid in November of 2020. My doctor called me to say my test was positive. He said I should stay at home in quarantine. He did not give me any medications. The news made me feel sad, nervous, and overwhelmed.

After the 14-day quarantine, I went to the Emergency Room (ER) because I still felt sick. The doctor told me that I was okay. They gave me instructions to follow up with my primary care doctor and to take time off work. When I was at home with my wife preparing for the holidays, I suddenly felt ill. After I ate, I felt my head getting hot and sweaty. My chest and back were hurting. I was dizzy and short of breath. My wife drove me back to the ER, and I almost passed out waiting for a doctor.

Finally, they took me to a room and treated me with many medications. The medical team said my blood pressure was too high and it caused a tear in my artery. (This is called an artery dissection.) I was admitted to the hospital, and I spent 12 days there. Then they told me I was

going to be okay and sent me home. One month later I was still having the same symptoms. I called my cardiologist and explained how I felt. I went back to the Emergency Room and they admitted me back to the hospital for three days. Then the doctors sent me back home.



*High blood pressure is also called hypertension. Think about the meaning of “hyper” and “tension.” Study the graphic above. Learn any unfamiliar vocabulary. Describe in your own words what high blood pressure means for your arteries and blood vessels.*



*We often have to navigate bureaucracies to get things done. When bureaucracies are excessive, there is an idiom for that: red tape. Have you ever been “caught” in bureaucratic “red tape”? Describe what happened.*

Eventually, they realized the dissection was getting bigger. They decided I needed a bypass graft surgery. I was very nervous and even called my sisters in Mexico. They told me to do what I needed to get better. My brother in Colorado offered assistance if I needed it.

After the surgery, there was a big problem. The pump they put in my neck was bleeding a lot. The doctor said that I needed another surgery as soon as possible to see why I was still bleeding. At this point I was physically exhausted and felt like I was going to pass out. So, I had the second surgery and I was okay, the bleeding stopped.

When I got Covid, it was still early in the pandemic. The doctors were still learning about Covid. I believe Covid caused my high blood pressure, which caused the artery dissection.

### And Now a Covid Long-Hauler

Now, three years later, my whole body still hurts. I still have chest tightness, back pain, headaches, dizziness, chronic muscular pain, weak legs, and low energy levels. Most of the time, after I eat, I have hot sweats. I feel tired and want to

sleep all the time. Sometimes, I have memory loss. I am taking a lot of medications to manage my symptoms. Constantly, I have appointments with my primary care doctor and with specialists in neurology, cardiology, infectious disease, rheumatology, endocrinology, as well as a nutritionist and a physical therapist. I am told they are still learning about Covid-19 long-haulers.

Before the pandemic, I was working two jobs successfully, but now I am out of work. I worked for South Shore Hospital for eight years. On January 1, 2021, I lost my life insurance and critical illness benefits. Six months later, my employer stopped my health insurance. They did not give me any notice. When I contacted Human Resources, they did not help me. This has put extra stress on me and I was very upset.

Today, I will be going to a special clinic at Brigham and Women’s Hospital. I will see a Covid specialist who will hopefully help me cope both physically and mentally. In the future, I would like to go back to work. But for now, I take my medications and hope for the best.

#### AFTER YOU READ:

1. In what ways has the author had to navigate and use information since he became a Covid long-hauler?
2. Discuss how people in the U.S. access health insurance. What works well? What doesn’t? See [Issue 28](#) for more information.

*Juan Torrez is a student at Literacy Volunteers of Massachusetts. He was born in Mexico and lives now in Massachusetts with his wife. In the past, Juan was an employee of South Shore Hospital and The American Cleaning Company until his illness. In the future he would like to return to work at the hospital.*

