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How Emma Samms Copes with Long COVID as She Returns to 'General' 'Hospital': 'I Take My Days Off Lying in Bed'



Emma Samms is returning to the ABC series *General Hospital*, but she was upfront with producers about her limits when she walked on set last month.

"I told them if I stand still for too long, I might fall over. I might lose my voice if I talk too much. I sometimes sound gaspy," she tells PEOPLE. "I said, 'Basically, think senior citizen and not a fit one. Just think in those terms when you are writing for me.' "

Since contracting COVID in March 2020, Samms, 62, has battled exhaustion, shortness of breath, blood pressure fluctuations, and, during a second encounter with the virus in June, tinnitus (chronic ear ringing).

"I'm so cautious now. If I look at the distance to walk, I think, 'How unwell will I feel if I walk?' I'm always clocking, 'Where's the nearest hospital?' My inclination is to lie still in a quiet, dark room. That's the only safe place health-wise for me," she says. "And I am not alone."

According to census statistics, more than 16 million people in the United States are now suffering from Long COVID, and the majority of them are unable to work full-time as a result of the condition. "It's an ongoing mass disabling event, and it's been frightening to witness," says Samms. "For me, it's been a battle of the wills to accomplish anything."

It took Samms two years to recover sufficiently to return as Holly Sutton, the *General Hospital* character she initially played in the 1980s before moving on to nighttime soaps *Dynasty* and *The Colbys*.

She came to Los Angeles for the first time since the outbreak in

"September for a month-long shoot. "I had massive trepidation," admits Samms, whose GH episodes will premiere on October 20. (Due to congressional hearings, her initial return date of Oct. 19 was postponed.) "But I feel really lucky that people are willing to accommodate me in order for me to work. I feel desperately sorry for people who don't have bosses who are as sympathetic."

To prevent additional walking, GH executive producer Frank Valentini offered Samms his parking place near the studio, and she doesn't film every day. Valentini adds in front of the cameras, "You would never know there's anything wrong with her. She puts every ounce of energy into it."

Samms, on the other hand, struggles when she exerts herself. "The truth is, if I've made an effort and put on makeup one day, that doesn't mean I'm feeling better. I might look better, but it means I'll feel awful tomorrow," she says.

Samms will return home to north London after filming, where she resides with her husband, former BBC broadcaster Simon McCoy, 61.

Experts are still attempting to figure out what causes Long COVID, and Samms has lobbied for additional research; she even got a contributor's credit on a scientific study earlier this year in the United Kingdom.

The thought that her problems will be permanent "is depressing," she says. "But I still am so blessed. I love where I live, I have a fantastic husband, and my kids are grown and lovely. Even with Long COVID, life is very good."

Citation-

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