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UNDERSTANDING LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF COVID-19

It's been more than a year since the pandemic began, and there's more to learn more about the short- and long-term health effects of COVID-19. Although most people get better within weeks, some people experience [long-haul COVID-19](#)—a wide range of symptoms that can last weeks or months.

This article explores the prevalence of long-haul COVID-19, potential symptoms to watch for and prevention.

New Findings

A new [study](#) found that nearly a quarter of people who tested positive for COVID-19 sought medical treatment for new conditions at least 30 days postinfection. Long-haul COVID-19 impacted men and women of all ages—including children—and even people who didn't realize they had COVID-19 in the first place.

Post-COVID-19 conditions were more widespread in patients who had severe cases of COVID-19, but also in a substantial share of patients whose cases lacked symptoms. Based on the study, the following people developed long-haul COVID-19:

- 50% of patients who were hospitalized
- 27.5% of patients who were symptomatic but not hospitalized
- 19% of patients who were asymptomatic

Rapid and multiyear studies are underway to further investigate long-haul COVID-19 and how to treat its conditions.

New and Ongoing Symptoms of Long-haul COVID-19

People with long-haul COVID-19 report experiencing different combinations of the following symptoms:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Tiredness or fatigue
- Difficulty thinking or concentrating
- Cough
- Chest or stomach pain
- Headache
- Heart palpitations
- Joint or muscle pain
- Sleep problems
- Fever
- Light-headedness
- Change in smell or taste

People also report that their symptoms may get worse after physical or mental activities.

Multiorgan Effects of COVID-19

Some people who were severely ill with COVID-19 experience multiorgan effects or autoimmune



conditions over a longer time, with symptoms lasting weeks or months after COVID-19 illness. Multiorgan effects can affect most, if not all, body systems—including heart, lung, kidney, skin and brain functions. Autoimmune conditions happen when your immune system mistakenly attacks healthy cells in your body, causing painful swelling or tissue damage in the affected parts of the body.

While it is very rare, some people—mostly children—experience multisystem inflammatory syndrome (MIS) during or immediately after a COVID-19 infection. MIS is a condition where different body parts can become inflamed.

Effects of COVID-19 Illness or Hospitalization

Hospitalizations and severe illnesses with lung-related diseases, including COVID-19, can cause health effects like severe weakness and exhaustion during the recovery period.

Hospitalization effects can also include post-intensive care syndrome (PICS), which refers to health effects that begin when a person is in an intensive care unit and remain after a person returns home. These effects can include severe weakness, problems with thinking and judgment and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Symptoms that can occur after hospitalization are similar to the symptoms that people with initially mild or no symptoms may experience weeks after a COVID-19 infection. It can be difficult to know whether they are caused by the effects of hospitalization, the long-term effects of the virus or a combination of both.

Preventing Long-haul COVID-19

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), if you're not fully vaccinated against COVID-19 yet, the best way to prevent any long-term complications is by getting vaccinated as soon as possible. The CDC recommends that everyone 12 years of age and older should get a COVID-19 vaccination, regardless of whether you have had COVID-19 or a post-COVID condition.

Summary

If you are not already fully vaccinated against COVID-19, it's important to get vaccinated as soon as possible to

protect yourself and others from all virus variants and complications.

There are ways to help manage long-haul COVID-19, and many patients with these symptoms are getting better with time. If you think you have a post-COVID-19 condition or are experiencing conditions unusual for your health history, contact your doctor.