

How COVID-19 Can Affect You in the Long Run

COVID-19

Most people who get infected with the virus that causes COVID-19 will have mild illness, or no symptoms, and can recover fairly quickly. But for some people, COVID-19 can be severe and even deadly, especially if you have certain health conditions. If you're 50 or older or haven't been vaccinated, you're also more likely to get very sick from COVID-19.

Once infected, the virus can damage many different organs and systems in your body. Because of this, you can have long-lasting symptoms, complications (additional problems), and post-COVID conditions, also called long COVID.



What Is Long COVID?

Long COVID or post-COVID conditions are a wide range of new, returning, or ongoing health problems that you can have for weeks, months, or longer after first being infected. Anyone at any age who was infected can have them, even people who only had mild illness or no symptoms at all. You can even have long COVID if you never tested positive or knew you were infected in the first place.

If you aren't vaccinated against COVID-19 and get infected, you might also be at higher risk for long COVID, compared to if you were vaccinated and got a breakthrough infection.

Could You Have Long COVID?

At least 4 weeks after infection is the start of when long COVID or post-COVID conditions can typically be seen. Long COVID can be different for different people and, unlike testing for a current infection, there is no test to check for long COVID. This can make it hard to diagnose or identify.

Symptoms of long COVID can include:

- Fatigue (tiredness) that disrupts your daily activities
 - When your symptoms get worse after physical or mental effort
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Symptoms of long COVID can also include:

- Fever
- Problems breathing, shortness of breath, cough
- Headache, dizziness, chest pain, a fast heartbeat
- Feelings of pins and needles
- Problems thinking or concentrating, sometimes called "brain fog"
- Change in taste or smell
- Diarrhea, stomach pain
- Sleep problems
- Depression, anxiety
- Rash
- Joint or muscle pain
- Changes in your period (menstrual cycle)



Some symptoms can last for weeks or months, and some may even go away and then come back. For most people, symptoms can get better over time, but for others they can last and even cause disability.

New Health Conditions After COVID-19?

Because the virus that causes COVID-19 can damage many different organs and systems in your body, you can also develop new health conditions after being infected.

These can include:

- Autoimmune conditions where your immune system -- your body's natural defense system -- attacks your tissues by mistake. Symptoms may last for weeks or months, especially if you had severe COVID-19
- Diabetes and heart, brain, and nerve conditions. COVID-19 can affect many organs and systems, including your heart, lungs, kidneys, skin, and brain. Because of these multiorgan effects, you may be more likely to develop new health conditions compared to if you didn't have COVID-19

So whether you've had COVID-19, know you've been exposed, or just aren't sure, talking to your doctor and healthcare team about your overall health will be important.

Questions you can ask your doctor and healthcare team can include:

What should I do if I get COVID-19?

Am I at a higher risk for severe illness?

How will I know if I have long COVID?

If I get long COVID, what can we do to help relieve my symptoms and protect my quality of life?

Can I get any other health conditions because of COVID-19?

What should I do if I get stressed or depressed?

Where can I find more information and resources?