

Understanding long COVID: Suggested talking points

- **Common long-term [symptoms](#) of COVID-19 include fatigue, shortness of breath, “brain fog,” and changes to individuals’ senses of taste and smell.**
 - Scientists are still learning about the long-term impacts of COVID-19 and what causes these issues to develop.
 - A recent [study](#) found that people with prior COVID-19 infections are more than 60 percent more likely to develop any cardiac issue.
 - Long COVID symptoms vary and may show up immediately after infection or months later. People who experience mild or asymptomatic infection still face a risk of developing long-term symptoms.
 - A recent [study](#) found four factors that may be associated with long COVID: high levels of viral RNA early in an infection, the presence of certain autoantibodies (antibodies that mistakenly attack the body’s own tissues), the reactivation of Epstein-Barr virus, and having Type 2 diabetes.
- **If you have long COVID, consider seeking treatment, joining a support group, or filing for disability benefits.**
 - See a doctor or therapist to address symptoms. Breathing exercises, physical therapy, medications, and other treatments can improve health. There are also ways to manage long COVID [fatigue](#).
 - [Post-COVID care clinics](#) and [doctors](#) with experience treating autonomic disorders commonly seen in long COVID can provide valuable insight.
 - Join online communities like [Body Politic](#) and [Long COVID Support Group](#) for further support and advice.
 - People who experience long COVID can also qualify for [disability](#) protections and benefits, though the process to do so can be challenging.
 - The lack of knowledge around long COVID can lead health care professionals to dismiss patients or misdiagnose symptoms, but it is key to acknowledge and validate patients who are experiencing these chronic health conditions.
- **The best way to avoid long COVID is to prevent infection in the first place.**
 - Getting vaccinated and boosted reduces the risk of long COVID by lowering the chance of infection in the first place.
 - In the case of breakthrough infections, however, [studies](#) suggest that vaccination might only halve the risk of long COVID or have no effect on it at all.
 - Even for people at low risk of severe illness and death from the virus, long COVID remains a concern and could result in life-changing consequences.

Understanding long COVID: Frequently asked questions

1. What causes long COVID and what makes people more susceptible?

Scientists are still trying to figure out the causes of long COVID. A recent [study](#) found four factors that may be associated with long COVID: high levels of viral RNA early in an infection, the presence of certain autoantibodies (antibodies that mistakenly attack the body's own tissues), the reactivation of Epstein-Barr virus, and having Type 2 diabetes. These findings tell us that in some cases, the body may still be fighting remnants of the virus, disrupting the immune system. In other cases, the virus may trigger an autoimmune response that causes the body to mistakenly attack its own tissues or organs.

There's also much uncertainty around what makes people susceptible to long COVID. Long-term symptoms are not limited to people who became severely ill as a result of COVID-19 infection. People who were only mildly ill or asymptomatic have also reported experiencing lingering health effects. Some data shows that women are affected more than men, especially middle-aged females. Children are not exempt from long COVID risks either, although they are at much lower risk compared to adults.

2. Are vaccines effective in preventing long COVID?

[Studies](#) suggest that, in the case of breakthrough cases, vaccination might only halve the risk of long COVID or have no effect on it at all. That being said, vaccines lower the chance of getting infected in the first place, which is the best way to avoid the risk of long COVID. Being vaccinated and boosted, as well as utilizing other public health measures such as masking and sanitation, remains the most reliable way to protect against long COVID.

3. Where can I go to seek treatment for long-term symptoms?

Because the causes of long COVID are still very much a mystery to us, it can be a challenge finding treatment that is specific to your conditions. The first step would be to see a doctor or therapist to work on addressing your symptoms. You may also consider visiting a [post-COVID care clinic](#) or a [doctor](#) with experience treating autonomic disorders, which are commonly seen in long COVID. Online support groups and resource hubs can be good places to go for comfort and advice, such as [Body Politic](#), [Long COVID Support Group](#), and [Long COVID Alliance](#). Another action you can take to cope with lasting symptoms is file for disability benefits. [Here](#) is federal guidance on long COVID as a disability.