

Member Update

Quarter 1 2023



Living with long COVID

Most people recover fully and quickly from COVID-19 — but some don't. Physical and mental symptoms can develop during or after having COVID, known as post-COVID symptoms. Many people refer to this later or lasting illness as "long COVID."

What are post-COVID symptoms?

Symptoms of long COVID generally last more than a month and can't be explained by another cause. And even though the infection has cleared, old symptoms may linger and new ones can develop.

It's not clear why long COVID happens to some people and not others. While it may be worse in people who were very sick and had to be hospitalized, even young and previously healthy people who only had mild infections can get long COVID.

Common long COVID symptoms include:

- Fatigue
- Getting short of breath with exertion
- Chest pain
- Cough
- Joint pain and body aches
- Loss of smell or taste
- Hair loss
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Poor memory or concentration

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If you have symptoms of long COVID, you may need closer evaluation. That could mean lab tests as well as heart or lung tests, though it varies from person to person. You might also need rehabilitation or medication to help with symptoms.

Regardless of how severe your case is and whether you need treatment, recovering from COVID can be slow. It's common for people with long COVID to have symptoms for many months.

Having symptoms of long COVID?

Talk to your primary care physician. You'll get a thorough evaluation and, if needed, a referral to the Post-COVID Clinic, which specializes in caring for people with long-term COVID symptoms.

Have the flu? Antibiotics aren’t for you.

Most of us have tried and true ways we combat flu symptoms, like sipping chicken soup to fight the sore throat and wrapping up in blankets to ward off the chills.

Maybe you call your doctor, too. But before you ask for any medications, know the difference between bacterial and viral infections. What you’ve caught will determine your treatment.

Viral infections and antibiotics

Antibiotics treat bacterial infections, but influenza is caused by a virus, so antibiotics aren’t effective treatment. Antibiotics may do more harm than good if you have the flu. They won’t help you feel better, and they can cause other health problems.

That’s because viruses infect your body in a different way. Because viruses multiply inside your cells, antibiotics can’t reach (or kill) them.

Antibiotics: Too much of a good thing

The fewer antibiotics we all take, the better — for ourselves and the whole planet.

Although antibiotics kill both good and bad bacteria, they can miss bacteria like *Clostridium difficile* (C. diff). After taking antibiotics, you could get a C. diff infection, which causes diarrhea and may need emergency medical attention. Antibiotics can also cause abdominal pain and yeast infections like vaginosis or thrush.

Overuse or misuse of antibiotics also contributes to the rise of “superbugs,” or antibiotic-resistant bacteria. So avoiding antibiotics when you don’t need them is one way to promote good health globally.

Prevention is the best medicine

Keeping yourself healthy during flu season starts with prevention.

The best first step: Get vaccinated. The flu shot may not be 100% effective in preventing illness, but it can keep you from getting severely ill.

Getting your flu shot is easier than ever for Geisinger patients. Get a walk-in flu shot during business hours at:

- Geisinger primary care clinics
- ConvenientCare (urgent care) clinics
- Geisinger Pharmacy locations

To avoid longer wait times, you can schedule an appointment.



Treatments for viral flu

Feeling sick? Ask your doctor whether you have a bacterial or viral infection. From there, they can tell you what the best treatment is. If it’s bacterial, antibiotics can help. But if it’s viral, it needs to run its course.

If you have the flu, seek treatment early. In the first two days doctors can prescribe antiviral medications that can make you feel less sick — and for less time. If you’re diagnosed with the flu after more than two days, over-the-counter medication can still help you feel better.

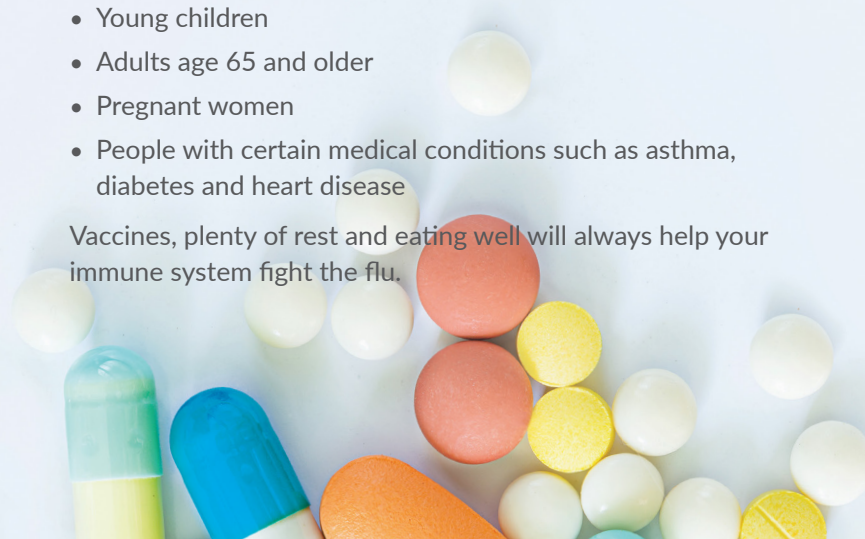
Even without medication, viruses are “self-limiting,” meaning they’ll go away with or without treatment. Try some home remedies, too, like:

- **Rest:** Sleep will help your immune system fight the illness.
- **Drinking plenty of fluids:** Water, herbal tea with honey and lemon, broth and 100% juice can help you feel better and keep you hydrated.
- **Home remedies:** Using menthol ointment, taking a hot bath and eating chicken soup are trusty ways to relieve cold and flu symptoms.

If you’re not getting better after 10 days with a cold or flu, or if symptoms are getting worse at any time, talk to your doctor. People at high risk of flu complications include:

- Young children
- Adults age 65 and older
- Pregnant women
- People with certain medical conditions such as asthma, diabetes and heart disease

Vaccines, plenty of rest and eating well will always help your immune system fight the flu.



A comfort food classic

The classic Irish dish shepherd’s pie, which dates back to the 18th century, almost certainly started as an attempt to use up leftovers in a tasty way.

The result is comforting and delicious, and will warm you from the inside out. Cooks like to put their own spins on this dish, so once you’ve mastered the classic version, try experimenting with different seasonings and vegetables and make a dish that’s your very own.

Healthy shepherd’s pie

Ingredients:

- Butter-flavored cooking spray
- 1 small onion
- 1¼ pounds ground sirloin
- ½ cup reduced-sodium beef broth
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tablespoon tomato paste
- Freshly ground pepper
- 2 russet potatoes, peeled, cut into uniform-size pieces
- 3 garlic cloves, cut in half
- ¼ cup skim milk
- 2 tablespoon egg substitute
- 1 cup frozen baby peas, thawed
- Ground paprika

Directions:

1. Heat oven to 425° F. Coat a casserole dish with cooking spray and set aside.
2. Coat a nonstick skillet with cooking spray. And the onions and sauté over medium heat until wilted, about 5 minutes. Add the meat and cook, breaking it up with a wooden spoon, until browned. Strain the meat mixture in a colander to drain the fat and liquid. Return to the skillet. Add the broth, Worcestershire sauce, tomato paste and pepper. Simmer for 10 minutes.
3. Meanwhile, boil the potatoes with the garlic in lightly salted water until done. Drain the potatoes and remove the garlic. Mash the potatoes with the milk and egg substitute. Add the pepper to taste.



Wellness corner

Get ready to start moving more with our March Mayhem challenge! Compete against others across the state individually or with a team for bragging rights and prizes. Crush this four-week challenge by earning the most step equivalents through physical activity and surprise overtime challenges. March Mayhem will boost your physical activity and focus on other important aspects of your well-being. This challenge kicks off on March 6, 2023, so register today at go.geisinger.org/mmreg.

Keep up the momentum to achieve your health and wellness goals this New Year by joining our well-being webisodes, Coffee and Convos and more. Each month, learn about a different health and wellness topic and hear from experts in the field. Don’t miss out — sign up for these events and a monthly wellness email at go.geisinger.org/wellnesscalendar.



4. Place the meat mixture in the prepared casserole and top with the peas. Spread the mashed potatoes over the top. Coat with cooking spray and sprinkle with paprika. Bake for 25–30 minutes, until heated through and nicely browned. Serve immediately.

Nutrition information per serving: Calories 240, fat 4.5 g, protein 23 g, carbohydrate 29 g, fiber 3 g, cholesterol 50 mg, sodium 210 mg, potassium 466 mg



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