

Overweight women most likely to suffer long COVID, according to new research

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Overweight women are more likely to experience symptoms of long COVID according to new research from the University of East Anglia.

The new study, published today, is one of the largest studies on long COVID in the U.K. It shows that having a higher BMI is linked with the condition, and that women are more likely to experience long COVID

than men.

The research also shows that people with long COVID are much more likely to need additional, and often lasting, NHS care than those who make a swift recovery.

Prof Vassilios Vassiliou, from UEA's Norwich Medical School, said, "Long COVID is a complex condition that develops during or after having COVID, and it is classified as such when symptoms continue for more than 12 weeks.

"Just over two million people in the U.K. are thought to suffer with long COVID and it affects people in different ways. Breathlessness, a cough, heart palpitations, headaches, and severe fatigue are among the most prevalent symptoms.

"Other symptoms may include [chest pain](#) or tightness, brain fog, insomnia, dizziness, [joint pain](#), depression and anxiety, tinnitus, loss of appetite, headaches, and changes to sense of smell or taste.

"We wanted to find out what factors might make people more or less susceptible to developing long COVID."

The research team surveyed patients in Norfolk who had received a positive COVID PCR test result in 2020. A total of 1,487 people took part in an [online survey](#) which covered long-COVID symptoms such as breathlessness, chest pain, fatigue, memory problems, and anxiety.

They found that more than half of the participants (774) were experiencing at least one long COVID [symptom](#), showing a high self-reported prevalence.

Next, they looked to see what factors might make people more or less

likely to suffer the condition by looking at the participants' medical records.

Factors including BMI, sex, medication use, other [health conditions](#), and whether they lived in a deprived area were taken into account.

Prof Vassiliou said, "We show that more than a half of the survey respondents who tested positive for COVID in the East of England during the first year of the pandemic went on to report long COVID symptoms.

"All of these people were infected in the months before the COVID vaccination program was rolled out and they suffered from numerous new symptoms that were not present before their COVID infection.

"Interestingly, we found that more women than men had long COVID symptoms. We also found that having a higher BMI was linked with long COVID.

"This is really important because information like this can be used to profile those people who are 'at risk' of developing long COVID.

"We also found that people with long COVID were over three times more likely to use [healthcare services](#) than those who didn't display long COVID symptoms.

"We hope that our work will help policymakers plan local services and also inform the wider public of the scale of the long COVID pandemic," he added.

Dr. Mark Lim, interim service director of the Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care Board, said, "When COVID-19 struck it was new to everyone. All clinicians and the wider health and care system worked

extremely hard together to deal with the impacts of the virus and protect our people and communities.

"Our academic colleagues at the University of East Anglia have really helped local health and care organizations to identify local patients at risk of long COVID, helping us to do all we can to support them on their recovery journey."

This research was led by the University of East Anglia in collaboration with the Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital, the Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care Board, East Suffolk and North Essex Foundation NHS Trust, Ipswich Hospital and University College London, Newcastle University and the University of Cambridge.

"Post-COVID-19 syndrome risk factors and further use of health services in East England" is published in the journal *PLOS Global Public Health* on November 30, 2022.

More information: 'Post-COVID-19 syndrome risk factors and further use of health services in East England', *PLOS Global Public Health* (2022).

Provided by University of East Anglia

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