

Paxlovid lowers risk of long COVID, study finds

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The antiviral pill [Paxlovid](#) not only reduces hospitalization and death

after catching COVID-19: New research shows it also cuts the chances of long COVID by roughly 25%.

The drug, which combines a newer antiviral called nirmatrelvir with an older medication known as ritonavir, delivered that added bonus to patients, at least the mostly older white males who were part of a U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs study. The research was published on the preprint server [medRxiv](#), and has not yet been peer-reviewed.

"Paxlovid reduces the risk of severe COVID-19 in the acute phase, and now we have evidence that it can help reduce the risk of long COVID," study leader [Dr. Ziyad Al-Aly](#), chief of research and development at the VA St. Louis Health Care System, said in a [news release](#). "This treatment could be an important asset to address the serious issue of long COVID."

The study did not test for all types of long COVID conditions, but researchers found there were 2.3 fewer cases per 100 people of long COVID conditions, including [heart disease](#), blood disorders, fatigue, [liver disease](#), [kidney disease](#), muscle pain, thinking impairments and shortness of breath, three months after their COVID diagnosis.

But researchers did not find that Paxlovid helped with continued coughing or reducing the odds for a new diabetes diagnosis as a result of long COVID, *CNN* reported.

The research team studied the cases of 56,000 veterans who had contracted the virus. More than 9,000 patients were treated with Paxlovid within five days of infection between March 1 and June 30.

The patients had an average age of 65 and had at least one health issue that put them at higher risk for a more severe COVID, such as older age, diabetes or being a smoker.

While the study only included VA system patients who were mostly white and male, they were a mix of unvaccinated, vaccinated and boosted individuals, as well as those who had previously been infected with COVID-19.

"The totality of evidence suggests the need to improve uptake and utilization of nirmatrelvir in the acute phase as a means of not only preventing progression to severe acute disease, but to also reduce the risk of post-acute adverse health outcomes," the study authors wrote.

Paxlovid, made by the drug company Pfizer, can be used by people ages 12 and up. Though it's said to work best within five days of symptoms starting, it's not clear whether altering the dose to take higher amounts of the [drug](#) or to take it for more days would have more impact, *CNN* reported.

The National Institutes of Health plans to study using Paxlovid in patients who already have long COVID to understand any impact that may have.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on [COVID-19 treatments](#).

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