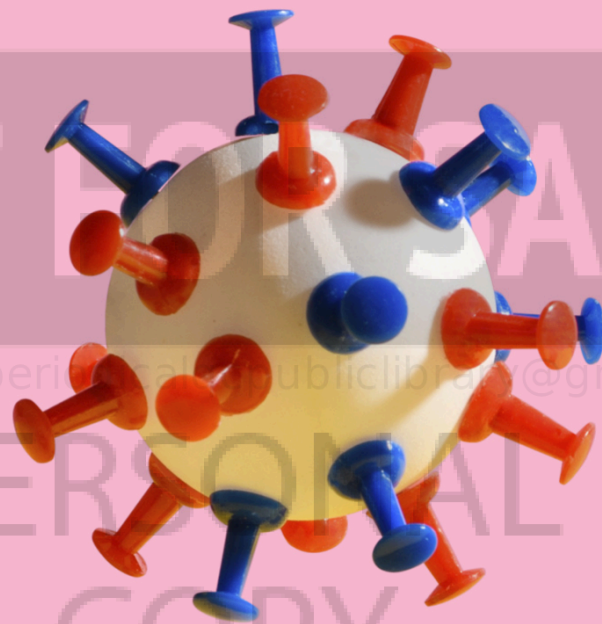


- Superstition / COVID

PREVENTION

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5 MYTHS ABOUT

LONG COVID

Untruths about this post-pandemic condition have gone viral. Avoid them like the plague and stick to these facts.

BY KATE ROCKWOOD





MYTH:

Long COVID isn't a real condition.

MYTHBUSTER

"Long COVID is very real and has very real biological causes," says Lisa Sanders, M.D., medical director of Yale

New Haven Health's Multidisciplinary Long COVID Care Center. People with long COVID may have characteristic abnormalities in blood tests, such as high or low white blood cell counts or low levels of the stress hormone cortisol; however, many will have normal blood tests. Other diagnostic tests have shown suspected effects: For instance, in some people with long COVID, the mitochondria—small structures in cells

that are responsible for producing energy—aren't as good as usual at picking up oxygen from the blood, says Dr. Sanders. That partly explains why more than one-third of people with long COVID have exercise intolerance and nearly 12% have symptoms compatible with myalgic encephalomyelitis/chronic fatigue syndrome (ME/CFS). "The changes might be invisible, but they are there," she says.



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MYTH:

COVID boosters don't protect against long COVID.

MYTHBUSTER

They absolutely do. "Compared to having received the primary vaccination series alone, receiving a booster vaccination reduces the risk of long COVID by up to 23%," says Saahir Khan, M.D., Ph.D., an assistant clinical professor of infectious diseases at Keck School of Medicine, University of Southern California. "And having more recently received a COVID-19 vaccine can also

reduce the risk of long COVID." Even if you do get COVID after having been vaccinated (it can happen), the vaccine can help the immune system eliminate the virus more quickly, making it less likely that viral particles will stick around to cause more damage. "If you get COVID, the vaccine protects you from some of the worst possible outcomes, like long COVID, as well as from dying," Dr. Sanders says.

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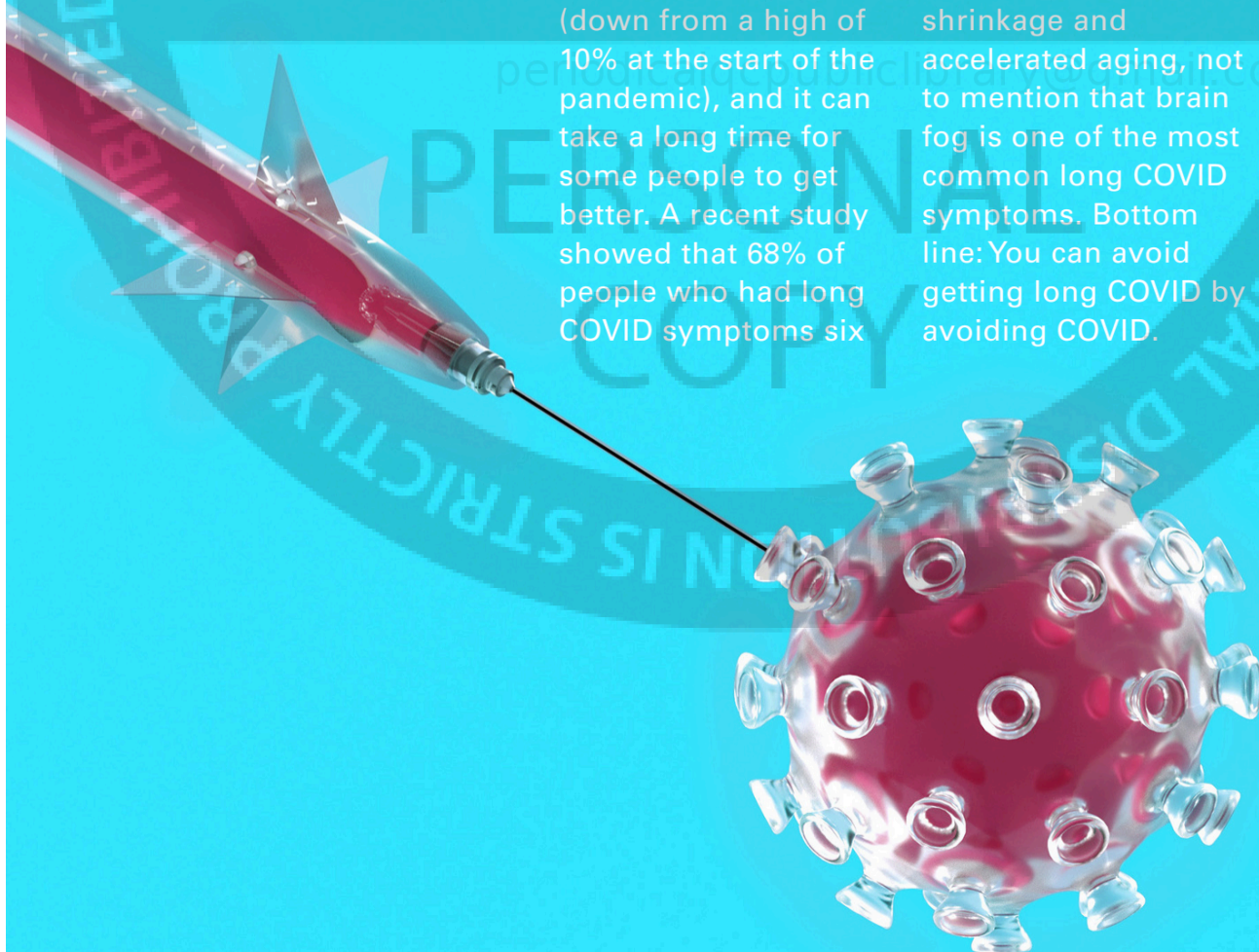
MYTH:

Long COVID isn't much of a problem anymore.

MYTHBUSTER

We wish. While the percentage of people getting long COVID these days is down, overall COVID infections remain high, so "that still turns out to be a big number," says Dr. Sanders. About 4% of vaccinated people and 8% of unvaccinated people get long COVID (down from a high of 10% at the start of the pandemic), and it can take a long time for some people to get better. A recent study showed that 68% of people who had long COVID symptoms six

months after a COVID infection still had the same symptoms in year two. And those symptoms were no picnic—they included fatigue or exhaustion, breathlessness, anxiety and/or depression, and sleep problems. Also, COVID-19 infection can damage the brain, including by causing brain shrinkage and accelerated aging, not to mention that brain fog is one of the most common long COVID symptoms. Bottom line: You can avoid getting long COVID by avoiding COVID.



WELLNESS

4

Long COVID is forever.**MYTHBUSTER**

Long COVID isn't always a lifelong condition. A study last year showed that about half of people who once had long COVID say they've recovered. And 48% of people with long COVID report recovering within three months, another analysis found. Not everyone will be that lucky, of course, but "studies say most people recover," Dr. Sanders says, though that doesn't necessarily mean their bodies and minds go back to a pre-infection state. "There may be lasting cognitive changes, but our brains are plastic. If something changes, we can often learn to work around it," Dr. Sanders explains. Long COVID is a collection of symptoms, so there is no single remedy, but many of the symptoms can be treated with options like medication, physical therapy, and pulmonary rehabilitation.

5

MYTH:

Doctors know what causes long COVID.

MYTHBUSTER

Nobody knows exactly what causes long COVID. And while being older, being a woman, being in poor health, and having a severe COVID-19 infection can increase risk, "anyone who is infected with the virus that causes COVID-19 can get long COVID," says Dr. Khan. Still, doctors and researchers have some ideas: Research points to several reasons some people develop

long COVID, including having remnants of the virus that continue to cause inflammation; reactivation of latent viruses like the Epstein-Barr virus; an autoimmune response in which the body attacks its own tissues and organs; and organ

and tissue damage caused by the initial infection. Essentially, COVID-19 kickstarts a complex immune response that must shut down once the infection is over; if it does not, says Dr. Khan, problems (and symptoms) can potentially pop up.



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