



COVID-19 PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLNESS GUIDE:

VACCINE HESITANCY

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Common Concerns About Getting the COVID-19 Vaccine

The vaccines have side effects like fever, tiredness, and headache?

It makes sense to be skeptical about something that's supposed to be good for your health but may cause you to feel sick briefly. Although it seems counterintuitive, feeling sick after being vaccinated a *good* sign – it shows your immune system is responding to the vaccine and building its protections against the virus that causes COVID-19. It is similar to feeling tired and sore after a workout – feeling discomfort shows our immunity muscles are strengthening.

I don't want to put anything unnatural in my body.

Many people are concerned that vaccines may be bad for our health because they're created by scientists rather than being a product of nature. This concern is valid given evidence for the benefits of natural foods and products. Actually, the fact that vaccines aren't natural is what makes them helpful! The natural form of a vaccine is the virus itself... in other words, getting the natural version is the same as getting COVID-19, which we want to avoid. Vaccines provide a safe way to build immunity from the virus without getting infected. Since the purpose of avoiding unnatural products is typically to protect our health, getting vaccinated may be more in line with that value than not getting the vaccine.

Wait, are you saying that the COVID vaccine contains COVID? Is that safe?

Fortunately, none of the three vaccines in the U.S. contain the virus that causes COVID-19, so there is no danger of getting COVID-19 from the vaccine. It makes sense that you'd hesitate about anything that may contain COVID! Instead, the vaccines contain harmless cells that are *similar* to the COVID-19 virus and teach your immune system how to fight it effectively. Two of the three vaccines (Pfizer and Moderna) use "mRNA," a blueprint for your body's cells. mRNA temporarily gives some of our cells instructions to make a particular marker, or protein, that our body will *think* is the virus that causes COVID-19, causing our immune system to learn to protect against COVID-19. If we are exposed to the virus that causes COVID-19 in the future, we would be protected because



our bodies already know how to fight it off. The third vaccine (Johnson & Johnson) works similarly: it contains harmless cells with that same marker to teach your immune system how to fight off the virus that causes COVID-19, much like how the flu vaccine works and is updated seasonally.

If you're interested in the science behind how the COVID-19 vaccine works on a biological level, check out these videos recorded by professors at Georgia Tech:

□ *Georgia Tech Videos:* <https://bme.gatech.edu/bme/9-things-know-about-covid-19-vaccines>

The vaccine has been politicized in a way that doesn't align with my political values.

It's true that the vaccine has become politicized and we often hear of it being more popular with Democrats than with Republicans, so it would make sense if you're hesitant to get the vaccine if it does not align with some of your values. Interestingly, there are actually a lot of conservative values that align with getting vaccinated and many Republican leaders have already received their vaccinations. Many people report getting vaccinated because they are pro-life, and they believe that higher vaccination rates will save more lives. Others report getting the vaccine because they are pro-freedom, and the sooner we reach herd immunity the sooner we can return to a life free of COVID restrictions. Still others report that getting the vaccine felt like an act of patriotism – there is nothing more American than banding together to overcome difficulty and help our neighbors do the same. These are just a few examples of how vaccines are relevant to everyone's values, not just a subset of Americans.

I don't trust researchers and medical doctors because my community has been misled by these folks in the past.

It's understandable to be distrustful of science and medicine due to the history of deceit and exploitation of certain communities within science and medicine. For example, in the mid-1900s, researchers studying syphilis misled and withheld treatment from Black participants in what is known as the Tuskegee Experiments, which is now recognized as one of the most unethical medical studies in US history. In response to these atrocities, there are now numerous systems and ethical committees in place to ensure that all medical and scientific practices are conducted humanely and do not cause harm, particularly for disadvantaged or vulnerable groups.

For more information addressing these concerns, particularly for the Black community, consider



watching the Tyler Perry special featuring Dr. Kimberly Manning (@gradydoctor) and Dr. Carlos del Rio at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=M56q6TIJ890

The COVID vaccine was developed way faster than previous vaccines, so I'm concerned it wasn't developed well.

Given the speed of the COVID vaccine development, it makes sense to wonder if the process was rushed. Many people were concerned about this, so they investigated the reasons these vaccines were developed much faster than past vaccines. Here are the main reasons:

- Because of the urgent need to protect the whole population from COVID-19, researchers started with the safest, most scientifically-proven and low-risk technologies when they began vaccine development. Usually, vaccine development involves brand-new therapies using new methods, which are then rigorously tested for effectiveness and safety over time. Because COVID vaccine development prioritized safe *existing* technologies and already-established methods, scientists could focus on optimizing vaccine effectiveness, and speed up the process considerably.
- Science is much more advanced than it was when previous vaccines were developed. For example, when the polio vaccine was developed in the mid-1900s we didn't even have computers! Advances in scientific technology allowed us to develop vaccines more quickly today. The researcher who pioneered the mRNA vaccine technique has worked on this type of vaccine for several decades and [her story](#) is inspiring.
- Because COVID-19 is contagious and dangerous and spreads quickly, it took less time to see that people in the clinical trials who did not receive the vaccine got sicker at higher rates than people who did receive the vaccine. In fact, the trials that tested the effectiveness of the COVID vaccine were some of the largest vaccine studies to date!
- Due to the life-altering consequences of the COVID pandemic, tons of money and resources were dedicated to developing the vaccine. Other vaccine trials haven't had access to nearly as much money, collaboration, and resources, so the process has taken longer. This collaborative approach and high investment strategy is now being applied to cancer and other diseases.

It's not FDA approved.

Certainly no one wants to feel like a guinea pig! The vaccines received emergency use authorization, which means development was expedited, but no corners were cut. Currently, the average timeline for vaccines to receive FDA approval is 4-5 years, meaning if the FDA had not intervened, the vaccines would have been coming out in 2024. Given the urgency of the pandemic, the FDA reviewed the vaccine trials for expedited approval. Rest assured that if the panels of experts did not feel they had enough information to safely approve vaccines for use, they would not have approved the vaccines for emergency use. Now that vaccines are being administered, even more



scientists and healthcare professionals are monitoring the vaccination effort closely to ensure the vaccinations are safe and effective. A great example is the recent pause on administrations of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. Something unexpected arose in very few individuals, and, out of an abundance of safety, the FDA paused J&J vaccinations while data could be checked over to ensure things were still safe.

If the vaccine doesn't prevent COVID-19 100%, why should I get it, especially when we constantly hear about new variants?

The vaccines can't guarantee you don't develop COVID-19, but they reduce your risk of contracting and spreading the virus; they are more effective than the annual flu vaccine. The biggest benefit of the vaccine is that it reduces the most serious consequences of COVID-19: severe symptoms, hospitalizations, and deaths. After the first dose, the risk of developing significant symptoms decreases and it plummets after the second. This is the case for all the variants, since they share the same protein markers that the vaccines use to train our immune systems. Preventing those serious consequences makes your life better and improves things for your community. Less serious cases means that doctors and hospitals can treat the sickest individuals more effectively and supplies can be used on those who need it the most.

I'm young and healthy, why do I need to get vaccinated?

While getting vaccinated certainly helps you, it also helps your community just as much, if not more. Everyone – not just the at-risk groups – is encouraged to get the flu vaccine for the same reasons. Vaccinated people transmit the virus that causes COVID-19 at low (almost non-existent) rates. If transmissions are reduced, community cases decrease, which allows for things in our communities to safely open up more quickly. As more people get vaccinated and community cases decrease, there is less pressure on the system that creates variants. Think about wildfires – the more contained the fire is, the less flare ups will spread the fire into new areas.

I'm pregnant or nursing, is it safe?

As with all decisions in pregnancy and nursing, benefits and risks exist and you should consult with your healthcare provider, who knows you and your little one best. Just like there is a risk of transmitting the virus to your baby if you were to contract it, the benefits of getting vaccinated also transfer to your baby through breastmilk. Because the vaccines don't use actual virus cells, they are as safe for your baby as they are for you.



Do I need to get a second vaccine?

One vaccine is better than no vaccine and it is understandable to not want to have to experience potential side effects or take more time off work. However, getting both vaccines of a two-part regimen (Pfizer and Moderna) gives you the best chance of protecting yourself and your loved ones. It's like deciding you are only going to wear your seatbelt on weekdays; 70% of the time you are likely to survive a car crash and have some protection, but you leave open the possibility of getting very hurt when you could protect yourself almost 100% of the time.

I have other concerns that aren't addressed above.

We recognize that everyone has a different reason they are eager or wary to get the vaccine. If you are still unsure, think about writing out all the pros and cons in consultation with a trusted health-care professional. Caring Communities is also here to listen.

How to Get the Vaccine & What to Know Before and After Receiving It

Where can I sign up for an appointment to get the vaccine?

Georgians can sign up to receive the vaccine at this website: <https://georgia.gov/covid-vaccine>

What should I expect at my vaccine appointment?

The vaccine is a quick injection in the upper arm. After receiving the injection, you will be asked to wait 15-20 minutes to ensure you don't have an allergic reaction. These reactions are rare, but talk to your doctor before receiving the vaccine if you have serious allergies or health concerns.

What should I expect after the vaccine?

Some people feel just fine. But it is not uncommon to have side effects for a few days. Arm soreness, fever, headache, and fatigue are unpleasant but are positive indicators that the vaccine is doing its job. If you are concerned about side effects interfering with your activities, talk to the provider at your vaccine appointment about whether they recommend taking some over the counter medications to prevent or treat the side effects.



What can I start doing once I'm fully vaccinated?

It takes time for your body to build up protection against COVID, so you should continue all safety behaviors for two weeks after your last dose. After that, it will be safe to engage in more activities! Safe activities for fully vaccinated folks change on an ongoing basis, so check out this website to see what the current recommendations are: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/fully-vaccinated.html>

Where can I get more information?

The best place to find information about COVID-19, including up-to-date information on the vaccine, is the CDC website: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/index.html>

Sources:

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