

# Looking after yourself while experiencing COVID-19 vaccine side effects

For Autistic young adults and their  
supporters

# About this information sheet

This information sheet gives you the basic steps for managing any side effects that you might experience after receiving a COVID-19 vaccination and for managing any sensory needs you might have alongside.

## Introduction

You might experience minor side effects after your COVID-19 vaccination. For most people, side effects last one or two days and then they recover with no further issues (1).

As an Autistic person, the way you experience side effects could relate to your sensory profile and any sensitivities you have. Understanding the side effects of the COVID-19 vaccines and planning ahead can help you prepare to manage both the possible side effects that you might experience and your sensory needs (if you have any).

## Common side effects

While some people don't experience any side effects after receiving a COVID-19 vaccination, it is not uncommon to experience side effects after receiving a COVID-19 vaccination (1).

Possible side effects can be different for the different types of COVID-19 vaccine (such as Pfizer, Moderna, Novavax or

AstraZeneca) but many are the same. Talk to your medical provider if you have questions about specific side effects from the vaccine you received.

The side effects most commonly experienced, regardless of vaccine type, can make you feel a bit unwell. They include:

- pain in your arm where the injection was given
- headache
- pain in your muscles or joints
- fever or chills
- tiredness (1)

## **Managing common side effects**

At the time of writing, the general medical advice suggests you:

- Take paracetamol to help with headaches as well as pains in your body, such as your arm, in the days after your vaccination (1).
- If you feel sick after your vaccination, you may need to take a break from your normal activities until the side effects pass (1).

# Managing your sensory needs

Being tired or not feeling good can make sensory sensitivities more intense and harder to manage for some Autistic people (2).

If you have sensory sensitivities, these may feel more intense while you are experiencing the temporary side effects of a COVID-19 vaccine. If you feel tired after your vaccination, let yourself rest.

Manage sensory sensitivities by using strategies that work best for you. The strategies that you use will depend on your body and how you experience the sensory world. Here are some tips:

## **Plan ahead**

If you're worried about how you might cope with vaccine side effects, try to plan to have 2 quiet days after your vaccination appointment. This way, you can be free to rest if you need to.

## **Be aware of your environment and triggers**

You might want to be more mindful and stay away from busy, loud, or bright places if you usually find them difficult.

## **Use adaptations if you need to**

Some Autistic people find headphones or earplugs helpful for noise sensitivity (2). Others use sunglasses to cope with lights

(2). There are lots of possible adaptations for different sensitivities. Try to prepare some that work for you.

## **Calming strategies**

Many Autistic people use soothing sensory inputs (like stimming) to stay calm or manage sensory challenges (2). Favourite music or nice textures such as soft blankets are calming for some people (2). Think about what is calming for you, and have some strategies ready in case you need them in the days after your vaccination.

## **Monitor your symptoms**

Use this [online side effect checker](#) to gauge the side effects that you are experiencing.

Some Autistic people have reported difficulty judging whether the side effects they experienced after receiving a COVID-19 vaccination were severe or not. If you are experiencing side effects and are unsure or worried about how severe they are, it's best to seek medical advice. Talk to your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist.

Most people don't experience complications after their COVID-19 vaccination. However, it is good to be aware of what the range of side effects are just in case. See below for more information on the side effects that require more immediate attention.

## Serious side effects and when to seek help

Serious side effects are very rare. Most people have only minor side effects, and usually they don't last for long.

There is a small risk of allergic reaction to COVID-19 vaccinations (1). If you are experiencing side effects from a COVID19 vaccine and you think you might be having an allergic reaction, watch out for:

- rashes or itchy skin
- difficulty breathing, shortness of breath or wheezing
- swelling of your face, mouth, tongue or other body parts, or
- fainting, dizziness, or feeling lightheaded.

If you think you're having an allergic reaction, it's important to seek medical attention.

Call 000 if you're experiencing severe symptoms such as wheezing, difficulty breathing, racing heartbeat or if you collapse (1).

You should also seek medical help if:

- you have unexpected symptoms
- you're worried about your side effects, or
- you have a common side effect that lasts more than a few days

# References

1. After you get the COVID-19 vaccination. healthdirect. Healthdirect Australia; 2022.
2. MacLennan K, O'Brien S, Tavassoli T. In our own words: The complex sensory experiences of autistic adults. J Autism Dev Disord. 2021 Jul 13