

New risk factors linked to increased risk of COVID-19 infection

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As the COVID-19 pandemic lingers, researchers have found associations between certain lifestyle factors and a person's risk of getting infected. While it has already been established that those with Type II diabetes and a high body mass index (BMI) are at greater risk of experiencing hospitalizations and other severe complications related to COVID-19, they are also at greater risk of getting symptomatic infection in the first

place. That is the finding of a recent study conducted by researchers at the University of Maryland School of Medicine that was published today in the journal *PLoS ONE*.

Using data from the UK Biobank of 500,000 British volunteers over age 40, the researchers examined health factors in those who tested positive for COVID-19 and compared them to those who tested negative. They found that those who had positive COVID-19 test results were more likely to be obese or have Type II diabetes. Those who tested negative were more likely to have high levels of "good" HDL cholesterol and be at a healthy weight with a normal body mass index (BMI).

"Certain baseline cardiometabolic factors appear to either protect a person from COVID-19 infection while others make a person more vulnerable to infection," said study author Charles Hong, MD, Ph.D., professor of medicine and director of cardiology research at the University of Medicine School of Medicine. "But this study wasn't designed to determine what factors actually cause COVID-19 infections. These are statistical associations that point to the importance of a healthy functioning [immune system](#) for protecting against COVID-19 infection."

He and his colleagues controlled for potential confounding factors like [socioeconomic status](#), age, gender and ethnicity.

"Our findings point to some healthy measures people can take to help potentially lower their risk of COVID-19 infection," Dr. Hong said.

"Controlling [body weight](#) is very important during this time, and measures to increase HDL levels like regular exercise and a diet rich in monounsaturated fats like extra virgin olive oil and avocados might be helpful too."

More information: Ryan J. Scalsky et al, Baseline cardiometabolic profiles and SARS-CoV-2 infection in the UK Biobank, *PLOS ONE*

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