

# Taking care of you during COVID-19

We know that patients and their family doctors are worried about how to get care for heart-related problems during COVID-19. The Canadian Cardiovascular Society (CCS) has given us guidelines on how to handle this:

We are still accepting new referrals.

Your safety is our top priority. We always continue to respect physical distancing rules and will manage your cardiac conditions in the safest way possible.

We will schedule a virtual visit unless we feel that an in-person visit is required. In most cases, we will be able to get enough information on the phone or through video conference to be able to treat you. We can take care of you, even if you have known heart disease, by going back to basics and starting with a history and prescribing medications.

Keeping your immediate safety in mind, we will not be ordering too many tests right now. We will reschedule your previous tests and schedule new tests in the coming months. We want to reassure you that, in most cases, deferred testing doesn't change how we can care for you right now. Where necessary, we have access to urgent testing.

The good news is that there is lots of evidence to show that medicines can work well for patients with long-standing heart disease. Medication is often as good, if not better, than the “quick fix” of procedures, such as stenting and angioplasty, for long-term prevention. Procedures can be life-saving, however, in patients in the middle of a heart attack.

There has been a recent question as to whether certain medications such as ACE inhibitors (ACEIs), Angiotensin Receptor Blockers (ARBs), and Entresto make it more likely for you to get COVID-19. Research does not show this. The Canadian Cardiovascular Society states that stopping these medications can cause health problems. Do NOT stop taking your medications without consulting your doctors.

Don't take medications that claim to “prevent” COVID-19, without talking to your doctor. Currently, no drugs are approved to prevent COVID-19 infection, and medicines like hydroxychloroquine and azithromycin can cause serious heart rhythm problems. Some of you may have home blood pressure monitors. If you have any concerning readings on your home monitoring devices, like smartwatches, weighing scales, blood pressure monitors, or home ECG monitors, then write them down along with symptoms that worried or bothered you. Reach out to us for advice.

We ask you to reach out to us if you notice any new symptoms like leg swelling, unexplained weight gain, a racing heart, or chest pain. We can manage most problems like worsening heart failure, angina, atrial fibrillation at home. Often, the cause of worsening symptoms can be managed with lifestyle advice and changes in medications.

A new problem seems to have emerged. People who are very sick and need the hospital are avoiding the hospital, for fear of getting infected with COVID 19. Hospitals, however, are still safe and open and SHOULD be used for emergency services. We want to try and keep you healthy and deal with all urgent issues; however, if you experience new and sudden, severe chest pain, along with sweating, difficulty breathing, nausea, or vomiting, you may be having a heart attack and should call 911. Hospitals are safe if you need them. For all else, we are here for you!