



# COVID19: Heart of the Matter

**PATIENT SUPPORT GUIDE FOR HEART DISEASE PATIENTS  
DURING THE COVID PANDEMIC**

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**For the Executive Committee 2019-2020, Cardiological Society of India, Kerala Chapter**

# Note

- ▶ The questions discussed are based on real life queries raised by our patients.
- ▶ The answers provided are based on current scientific evidence and the prevailing COVID situation in Kerala. With accumulating information, the strategies might change.
- ▶ The content is only meant to act as a patient-friendly guide for those with heart disease and their families. Your treating doctor will be the best judge in specific issues.

**Q1:** I have heart disease. Should I follow all the COVID precautions advised for the general public ?

- ▶ YES. Definitely. All the precautions advised by the Health Authorities and the Government are applicable to you too.



## Q2: I have **heart disease**. So, should I be more worried about COVID ?

- ▶ Patients with preexisting medical conditions may be at risk for more severe forms of COVID infection. So, of course it is better to take extra precautions. However, there is NO need to panic. Stay Home, Stay Safe !



**Q3:** I was on **follow up and treatment** with my Cardiologist regularly. But now it is difficult to go and meet him/her, with the lockdown in place. I am feeling alright now. What should I do?

- ▶ Continue your regular medications as advised. The best thing now is to continue with the medications that are keeping you well now.
- ▶ If you have any minor heart-related symptom/doubt, if possible, try to contact the hospital/doctor through phone/e-Consultation portals/Email/WhatsApp.
- ▶ But if you feel you have a major heart-related symptom, it is advisable to contact the Cardiology Team at the earliest to make the appropriate decision.



# Q4: Why should I **avoid** going to the hospital 'unnecessarily' ?

- ▶ Its our duty now to restrict travel as far as possible and **Break the Chain** for our sake as well as for the sake of others. Please follow the instructions from the Government precisely.
- ▶ When you go to the hospital, you and your accompanying family member(s) will also be exposed to the hospital environment.
- ▶ All hospitals and health care systems are currently facing challenges to function effectively due to lack of resources/man power/personal protection equipment.



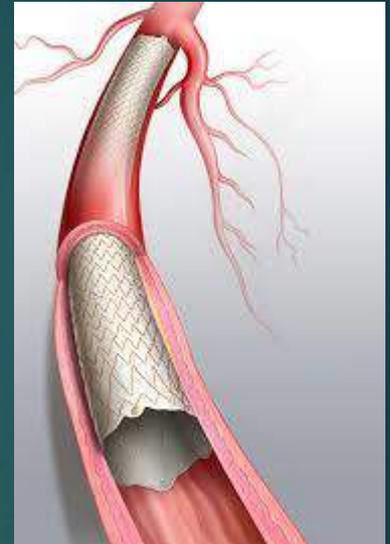
**Q5:** I was on regular medications from my Cardiologist. I used to buy the medications from the hospital during my visit. But now the same '**brands**' are not available at my local store. What should I do ?

- ▶ Preferably continue the same medications. If that is not possible, whatever brand is available close to you is fine too.
- ▶ The most important thing is that the drug and the dose should be the same.



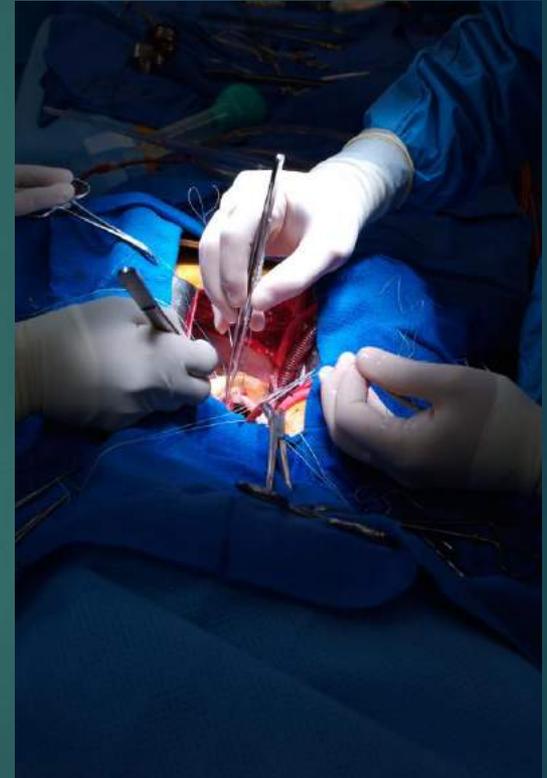
**Q6:** I had an **angioplasty** with stenting recently. Should I continue my medications ?

- ▶ Yes. It is very very important for you to continue the drugs to keep your stent safe from getting blocked and to prevent a heart attack.



**Q7:** I had a **Bypass** surgery (CABG). What should I do about my medications ?

Please continue your regular medications as advised by the Cardiologist/Cardiac Surgeon.



# Q8: I was given a date for a planned, **elective** angioplasty next month. Should I go ahead with this ?

- ▶ In the current lockdown situation, each hospital is making plans and modifying them from time to time to provide the correct care. The best person to help you make the right decision is your treating Cardiologist.
- ▶ If you have a very serious block or if you are having recurrent chest pain, the angioplasty is likely to be done as planned. But if your block is 'not so serious', and if you are a 'stable' patient, it may be safely planned later at a much more 'safer' time.



**Q9:** If I have a 'heart problem' during this difficult COVID period, will I get **treatment** ?

No need to worry about that. Heart disease will get priority in the health care system. You will definitely get appropriate treatment.



**Q10:** I am taking warfarin/acenocoumarin drugs as 'blood thinners' with monitoring of **blood INR** values. What should I be careful about ?

- ▶ Yes, that's an important question. If your INR was in the correct target range till recently, you should continue with the same drug and dose.
- ▶ If possible, monitor the INR. If the value is either too low or too high, or if you have any bleeding manifestation, please contact the doctor/hospital at the earliest. Very often, the dose can be 'adjusted' without you having to visit the hospital.
- ▶ You may also consider discussing with your doctor regarding changing your medication to some new drugs that do not require INR monitoring and hence make treatment simpler and also avoid travel to laboratories for blood monitoring (eg: DOACs – Direct acting Oral Anti-Coagulants, in suitable cases). Please also know that these new drugs are **not** useful if you have a metallic prosthetic valve in your heart after heart valve surgery.



# Q11: I am having **financial** difficulties to buy my medicines due to the current lockdown. Should I tell my doctor about this?

- ▶ Of course you should. Your doctor can then make appropriate changes to your prescription to make things easier for you.
- ▶ He/she could use multi drug combination pills that will cut down cost and reduce your pill burden.
- ▶ He/she may switch antiplatelet therapy to less costlier and widely available options, if suitable for you (eg: ticagrelor or prasugrel to clopidogrel)
- ▶ Some of the medicines may be available for free at nearby Government hospitals/Pharmacies.



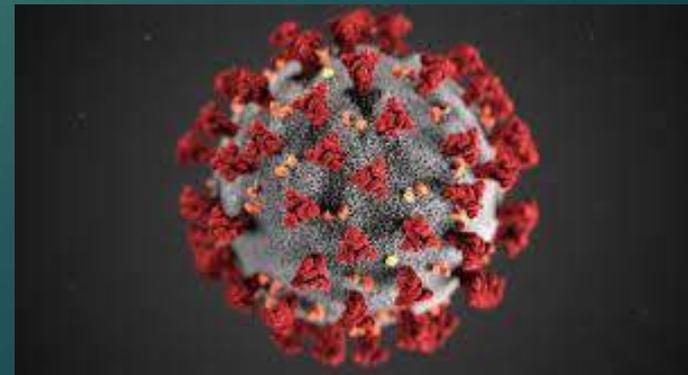
## Q12: I am on treatment for **hypertension** (high BP). Should I continue my medications?

- ▶ Yes, of course you must. It is very important to keep your blood pressure under control. Please continue all your prescribed medications unless specifically changed by your treating doctor.
- ▶ If you have any doubt regarding your medications, please contact your doctor.
- ▶ Since there are travel restrictions, you can safely rely on home BP monitoring devices (eg: Omron) to have an idea about your BP levels.



**Q13:** I am taking **ACE inhibitor** (ramipril/enalapril etc) or **ARBs**(telmisartan/Olmesartan/losartan/valsartan etc) for my hypertension/heart failure. Should I stop these ?

- ▶ No. Even though there are now some controversies about the use of these drugs, in general, as per current international consensus, there is no need to stop these drugs for this reason in someone who does not have the COVID infection.
- ▶ However, if you are concerned, you may discuss with your treating doctor regarding alternate drugs for hypertension, if feasible.



**Q14:** I was started on treatment with **statin** (atorvastatin or rosuvastatin) for high cholesterol and was advised to review after 2 months. But now I can't go for review. Should I continue to take it ?

- ▶ Yes, at this point in time, you should continue the medication as before. Dose modification, if required, may be done later once the COVID situation improves.



# Q15: I am a heart disease patient. On top of that, I have **diabetes** too. Should I be more worried about COVID?

- ▶ There is no need to get unduly worried. Ofcourse, diabetes puts you at a slightly higher risk for all infections, not just COVID. So, take all precautions and take extra care, that's all.
- ▶ It is important to have your diabetes well controlled during this time. Please consider home blood glucose monitoring.



**Q16:** My father has heart disease and he is on dialysis for chronic **kidney** disease too. What should he do ?

- ▶ Along with the cardiac medications, it is important to continue his dialysis sessions.
- ▶ Please discuss with his Nephrologist regarding any change in the number of dialysis per week or about options to undergo dialysis at a centre nearer to your home.



# Q17: I am on treatment for **heart failure**. What special care should I take at home now ?

- ▶ Please continue medications regularly.
- ▶ There is likely to be a change in your dietary pattern because of the lockdown. Follow fluid and salt restriction advice of your doctor meticulously.
- ▶ Avoid continuous bed rest so that deep vein thrombosis of your legs can be prevented.
- ▶ Social distancing is of paramount importance for heart failure patients.



**Q18:** My mother had a history of heart attack one year ago and she is on aspirin and clopidogrel. She was planned for an incisional hernia **surgery**. The surgeon asked me to consult with the cardiologist prior to surgery. What should I do ?

- ▶ It is prudent to postpone all elective (non-emergency) surgical procedures now as far as possible. Please discuss with your Surgeon to decide the safest course of action.
- ▶ If the surgery is definitely needed now, please consult with the Cardiology Team for advice that is based on her clinical status.



**Q19:** My husband had a heart attack 6 months ago following which he stopped **smoking**. Now that he is at home during the lock down with a lot of free time, he is starting to smoke again. Should I be worried ?

- ▶ Definitely. It is very very important that he stops smoking immediately. Smoking can not only increase his risk of getting a heart attack again, but also adversely affect his lung function and immunity, thus may make him more prone for serious pulmonary(lung) manifestations of COVID in case of an infection.
- ▶ In addition, smoking indoors at home during the lockdown exposes you, your children and other family members to the dangers of passive smoking.



## Q20: I have heart disease. Is it OK for me to take **alcohol** at home during the COVID pandemic?

- ▶ It is always better to avoid alcohol. With the lockdown too in place, there is a chance of alcohol withdrawal reaction if alcoholic beverages become unavailable.
- ▶ Alcohol withdrawal reactions may be particularly risky for heart disease patients.
- ▶ Please take help from Counselling and Helpline facilities provided by the Government.



**Q21:** After my heart attack, I have been **exercising** regularly at the Gym as advised by my Cardiologist. Should I continue it now?

- ▶ Of course the Gym is out of question now because of the lock down and the need for social distancing. But exercise can go on uninterrupted. You can adapt your exercise method to something that can be done safely at home. Even walking inside your home will help.
- ▶ Continuation of exercise will definitely help in maintaining your heart health as well as mental well being.



**Q22:** I usually undergo an echo and TMT (Treadmill Test) as part of 'health check-up' every year. Should I go to the hospital for this now ?

- ▶ No. If you are totally asymptomatic, please avoid hospital visits for routine check ups now.



**Q23:** My child was planned for **device closure** of a congenital heart defect (eg: a 'hole in the heart' like ASD – Atrial Septal Defect) during this 'school vacation' period. But I am worried that it may not be safe to go to the hospital now. What should I do?

- ▶ The best thing is to contact your child's Heart Specialist. He/she will take the right decision for your child, keeping in mind the diagnosis and indication (need) for the procedure.



## Q24: I have heart disease. If I develop COVID infection requiring hospital admission, what **information** should I give to my healthcare team ?

- ▶ Please keep ready your diagnosis, treatment records and medication list (preferably your most recent prescription). It may be good to keep photos of these on your mobile phone.
- ▶ This will help your doctors to give you the best treatment for heart disease and COVID.
- ▶ Your treating doctor might make some changes in your current cardiac medications or their doses, to best suit your clinical condition.



**Q25:** I read on WhatsApp that a drug called **hydroxychloroquine (HCQS)** can prevent COVID infection. Since I have heart disease, shall I get it from the medical store and start taking it at home as an extra precaution ?

- ▶ No. Please don't take any medicine without a doctor's prescription.
- ▶ HCQS Prophylaxis is not meant for all.
- ▶ Hydroxychloroquine can sometimes cause changes on your ECG (on a value called QT interval). Some of the cardiac medications or antibiotics you may be taking can have a similar effect on the ECG or can have drug interaction. Therefore, it should be taken **ONLY** with your doctor's instruction.



**Q26:** My relative is admitted to the hospital now with a heart attack. Shall I just go and visit him/her for a short while at the hospital ?

- ▶ Please avoid all unnecessary and non-essential visits to hospitals during this COVID period.
- ▶ You can always share your wishes to the patient or his/her family through phone/video-call/WhatsApp



**Q27:** I am a patient with heart disease. When I watch the TV news about COVID, I feel tense and **anxious**. It is even making it difficult for me to sleep well at night. What should I do to avoid this **panic** ?

- ▶ There is no need to panic. The Government and the Administration are doing everything to control the situation and keep us safe. Stay positive !
- ▶ Though it is good to keep abreast about the COVID situation, it would not do any good to you or those around you to be obsessive about COVID on TV news from all over the world.
- ▶ If 'too much' of information is making you uncomfortable, it is better to reduce stress on your heart and mind by limiting your screen time to once or twice a day and especially by avoiding watching COVID news just before going to sleep at night.



# Thank you



No one can whistle a symphony. It takes a whole orchestra to play it.

— *Halford Luccock* —

CSI (Cardiological Society of India) Kerala Chapter requests all it's members and our patients to cooperate with the Government, Health Authorities, Administration and the Police Force in the fight against COVID19