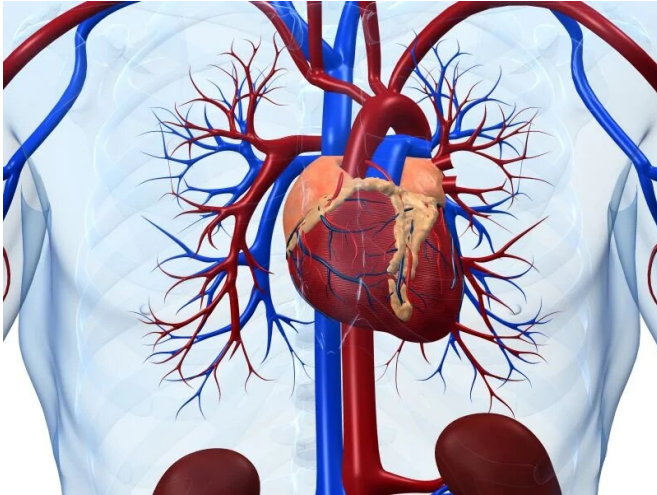


During pandemic, don't let up on heart-healthy behaviors

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(HealthDay)—The impact of COVID-19 on the heart isn't yet clear, but an expert says people with heart disease should take especially good care of their health.

"The effects of the COVID-19 virus on the heart are an actively developing topic right now," said Dr. Asim Babar, a cardiologist at Loyola Medicine in Maywood, Ill.

The unknowns include how heart disease affects COVID-19 recovery, and the possible direct impact of COVID-19 on the heart, including its potential to trigger [heart rhythm problems](#) (arrhythmias), [heart attack](#) and cardiac arrest.

For [heart disease patients](#), "the best thing to do is to continue taking medications that are prescribed," in order to prevent worsening of heart disease and to minimize the effects of [heart disease](#) on COVID-19, Babar said in a health system news release.

Don't start taking any over-the-counter or [prescription medications](#) without consulting a primary care provider or cardiologist. Those medications could interact with heart medications, Babar said.

While the combination of hydroxychloroquine and azithromycin has been touted as a possible COVID-19 treatment, Babar said these medications can affect the electrical conduction of the heart. Especially when taken together, they can trigger dangerous and potentially fatal arrhythmias and should only be administered under close monitoring, he noted.

It's also important to eat right and exercise during the pandemic.

"Just because you're staying at home doesn't mean you can't go outside for fresh air," Babar said. "Even walking in the backyard, or around the block, is beneficial to a person's heart and overall health."

With YouTube videos and phone apps that offer "guided exercise routines," there are no excuses for sitting the pandemic out.

If you're a heart patient and you're exercising outdoors, buying groceries or attending to other essential business where there are groups of people, wear a mask, avoid touching your face, and wash your hands before and after such outings, Babar said.

It's also important to stay in touch with your doctor during this time, especially if you have any [heart](#)-related changes or concerns.

More information: The American Heart Association has more on [COVID-19](#).

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