



fighting heart disease
and stroke

european heart network

Cardiovascular patients' fears in a time of Coronavirus

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Patients with cardiovascular disease worry greatly about the effects of the Coronavirus on their health.

With the outbreak of the Coronavirus, cardiovascular patients feel uncertain as to how they should relate to the general recommendations issued by governments or public health institutions. They need targeted advice, relevant to their particular diagnosis.

Patients with heart and circulatory diseases who are exposed to the Coronavirus are at increased risk of suffering a severe case of COVID-19, and they are likely to have worse outcomes as the cardiovascular system is put under great strain. All of this, of course, makes patients and their families and carers extremely anxious.

A study carried out by the Dutch patient organisation, *Harteraad*, found that **75% of people with cardiovascular diseases in the Netherlands fear the Coronavirus**. One of the worries expressed is about medicine shortages. Additionally, the study showed that because of the pressure of COVID-19, planned surgery is often cancelled. And while patients understand the rationale for this, they are concerned about potential adverse health consequences.

Online information, and in particular social media, which disseminates non-substantiated advice or recommendations, has added to the anxieties. As has the media coverage of the scientific community debate over certain blood pressure medication. Therefore, since the outbreak of COVID-19, many patients have turned to EHN members with numerous questions. For example, Hedwig (aged 79) contacted the *German Heart Foundation* to find out if the medicine she had been taking for around ten years after a heart attack would increase her risk of dying if she got infected with COVID-19.

To support heart patients, EHN members have compiled detailed information. A wealth of scientifically sound advice is available from EHN members' websites <http://www.ehnheart.org/covid-19.html>. In addition, several heart foundations and patient associations have organised webinars where patients directly ask questions to cardiologists.

Communicating with patients goes beyond information about medical care. For heart patients, it is important to keep the heart in good shape. Therefore, EHN members also provide tips on how to continue exercising, as well as how to shop for and prepare heart-healthy recipes. Inspired by this information, Otto (aged 72) from Germany set up a path in his apartment, which helps him get in 20 000 steps a day. Furthermore, he stays at home, and has food brought in by family members and friends.

Finally, the Swedish Heart and Lung Patients Association, *Riksförbundet HjärtLung*, reports that worries are not only related to patients' health. Many patients with heart and circulatory diseases are of working age and they fear going to work because of their increased risk, and yet still have no choice because they have to make a living.