

Electronic (online) communications include e-mail, webmail, secure messaging, electronic file transfer, text messaging and internet "portals" to exchange information between computers, tablets, smartphones. These can be useful ways for patients and healthcare providers to communicate, in addition to more usual visits and phone calls.

Advantages

- E-mail is simple, convenient and popular way of connecting; many people use it regularly
- Messages can be sent and received without needing both parties online at the same time
- Messages can be saved, copied and forwarded; they keep a record of what was said
- Some messaging systems are encrypted to help keep information private
- Some questions and issues can be handled by online messaging without a phone call or visit

Disadvantages

- E-mail devices and connections can fail, messages can be lost or sent to the wrong person
- There is no way to know if a message ever was received
- Messages can contain typing mistakes
- If the other party is away or their device is turned off, messages might not be seen promptly
- It is possible for a dishonest person to send a false message or impersonate a patient or doctor
- If both parties are not online at the same time, there is no opportunity to clarify misunderstandings
- Saved copies or messages sent in error can't be erased or retracted
- Messages can contain viruses that can damage systems or steal information
- Some medical questions and issues cannot be handled through online messaging

Our Electronic Communication Policies

1. **No emergencies or urgent messages.** Electronic communication is not to be used for emergencies or urgent messages. We do not monitor our in-box constantly. You can send a message any time, but we may not read it until the next business day. We check messages during regular business hours, and answer them in the order received. We try to deal with messages within 1 work day, but circumstances could cause us to fall behind. Use the telephone if you need a response right away. In a life-threatening emergency call 911.
2. **Uses.** Our practice accepts electronic messages for these purposes:
 - a. **General Messages.** Making or changing appointments, billing issues, or other questions that can be answered by an appropriate staff member.
 - b. **Prescription renewals.** Request refills of medications previously prescribed, the same way as leaving a phone message. If we have a question for you, we may contact you by electronic message or phone.
3. **Part of the record.** Electronic messages are considered part of your medical record. Our privacy policies for records and appropriate uses of medical information apply to messages we send to each other.
4. **Security.** You need to protect the E-mail address you give us, to make sure our communications remain private. This is the only way we can trust the messages from your E-mail are really from you, and messages we send are not going to someone else. If we aren't sure about a message, we will try to contact you in some other way.
5. **Availability.** If you ask us to use electronic messages to communicate with you, we will assume that you check your in-box at reasonable intervals. We don't guarantee that we will respond to your