

PRINTABLE FLOW TOOL

Flow Tool 6: Emergency, Same-Day, or Planned Follow-Up



PRINTABLE
VERSION

Practical triage, not a substitute for medical advice.

This page helps you sort urgency. It does not replace clinical judgment, and the examples are not exhaustive. If you are unsure whether symptoms could be an emergency, call 911. If the question is nonurgent, call your clinician.

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Call 911 Now

Do not drive yourself. Do not wait to see whether it passes. Do not assume it is anxiety, reflux, or muscle pain.

- Chest pressure, heaviness, squeezing, or tightness that is new and happening now; is severe or worsening; lasts more than a few minutes; or repeatedly returns
- Sudden severe chest or upper-back pain, especially with faintness, sweating, weakness, or a sense that something is seriously wrong
- New chest discomfort or breathlessness happening now at rest or with minimal exertion, especially with sweating, nausea, fainting, or marked weakness
- New pain or pressure spreading to the arm, jaw, neck, back, or shoulder, especially with chest discomfort or breathlessness
- Sudden severe shortness of breath; fainting or near-fainting; or a very fast or irregular heartbeat with dizziness or fainting
- Possible stroke: sudden face droop or numbness or weakness on one side; sudden confusion or trouble speaking or understanding; sudden trouble seeing; sudden trouble walking, dizziness, or loss of balance or coordination; or a sudden severe headache with no known cause. Call 911 immediately.

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Call Your Clinician the Same Day

Use this tier only if the symptom has completely stopped and no emergency feature above is present. Call your clinician now for same-day guidance. If you cannot reach a clinician promptly, or if the symptom returns, worsens, occurs at rest or with minimal activity, lasts more than a few minutes, or develops any emergency feature, call 911.

Examples: a new exertional pattern of chest pressure or breathlessness that has completely stopped; worsening exercise tolerance; recurrent palpitations without fainting; new or increasing swelling or rapid weight gain; or a concerning medication side effect without emergency signs. Trouble breathing or facial swelling is an emergency.

Blood pressure: Follow your clinician's personal report range. If a home reading is above 180 systolic and/or 120 diastolic, wait at least one minute and repeat it. If it remains this high with chest pain, shortness of breath, back pain, numbness, weakness, vision change, trouble speaking, or another new severe symptom, call 911. Without those symptoms, contact your health care professional promptly. Do not take an extra dose unless instructed. During pregnancy or postpartum, follow the obstetric plan instead: 160 systolic or 110 diastolic is severe and requires immediate contact with the obstetric team or urgent evaluation.

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Track Until Your Next Visit

Use this tier only when the finding has already been evaluated and you have a plan. Record the pattern and follow your clinician's instructions about when to call or seek urgent care.

- A familiar, unchanged symptom your clinician has already evaluated
- A borderline laboratory result with a planned review
- Stable imaging findings with an agreed follow-up plan
- Difficulty following activity, nutrition, or monitoring plans when the issue is stable and a follow-up plan is already in place

REMINDER

If you are running out of a critical medicine or expect missed doses, especially after a recent stent or while taking an anticoagulant, contact the prescribing team promptly rather than waiting for the next visit.