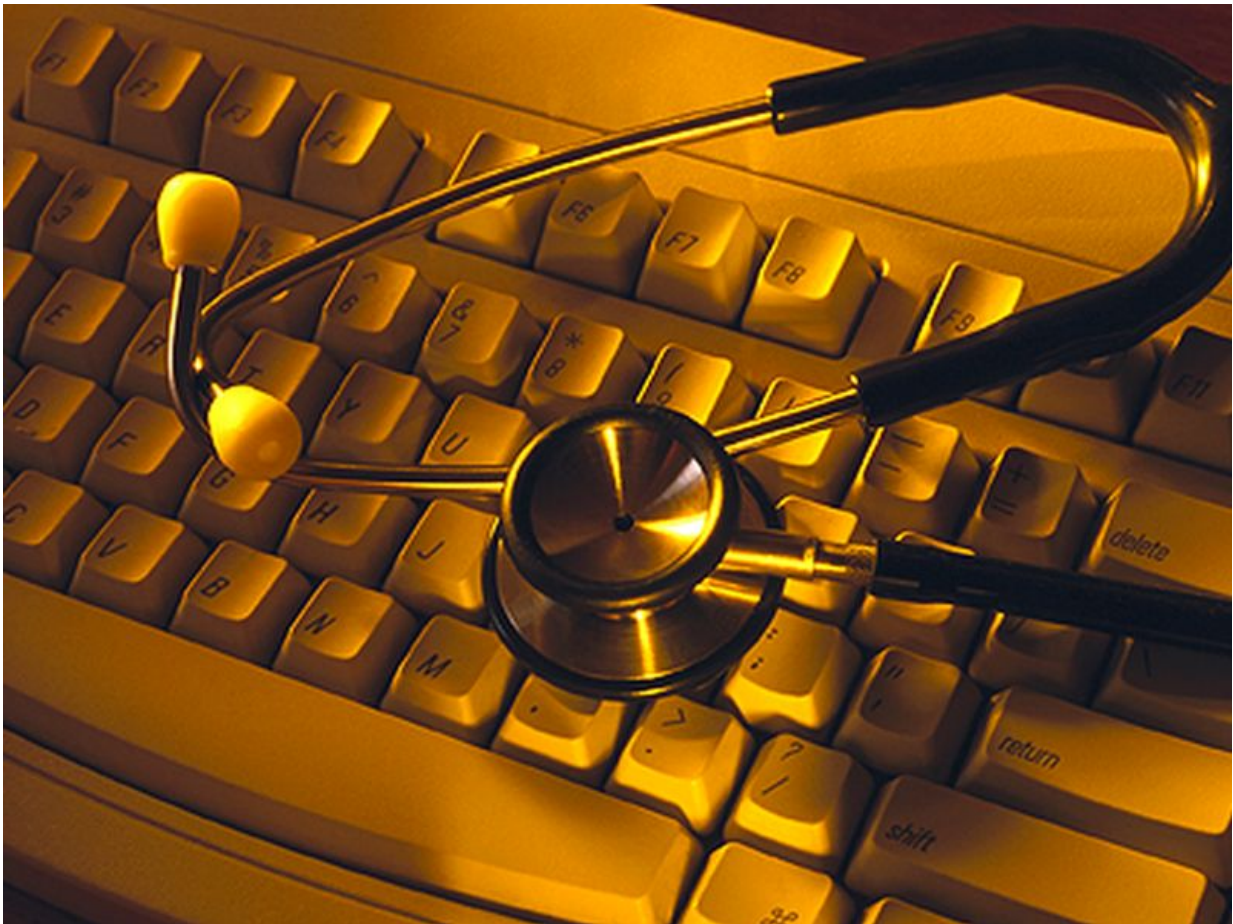


Many patients using e-mail as first method of provider contact

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(HealthDay)—For patients with chronic conditions, the ability to

communicate with their doctor via e-mail may help improve their health, according to a study published online Dec. 21 in the *American Journal of Managed Care*.

The study included 1,041 patients in northern California diagnosed with conditions such as asthma, [coronary artery disease](#), [congestive heart failure](#), diabetes, or hypertension. The patients had access to an online portal, which let them review their [health records](#), make appointments, refill prescriptions, and send confidential e-mails to their doctor.

A survey found that 56 percent of the patients had sent their doctor an e-mail within the past year, and 46 percent had used e-mail as the primary way to contact their doctor about medical issues. Thirty-two percent of those who exchanged e-mails with their doctor reported improvements in their health. Meanwhile, 67 percent said e-mailing their doctor had no effect on their overall health. For 42 percent of the patients, using e-mail to communicate with their doctor reduced the number of phone calls they made to the office, and 36 percent said they made fewer office visits. Among those who used e-mail to communicate with their doctor, 85 percent had co-pays of \$60 or more for each office visit, or high deductibles, compared to 63 percent with lower cost-sharing.

"We found that a large proportion of patients used e-mail as their first method of contacting [health care providers](#) across a variety of health-related concerns," lead author Mary Reed, Dr.P.H., said in a news release from Kaiser Permanente. Reed is a staff scientist with Kaiser Permanente's research division in Oakland, Calif. "As more patients gain access to online portal tools associated with [electronic health records](#), e-mails between patients and providers may shift the way that health care is delivered and also impact efficiency, quality, and health outcomes," she added.

More information: [Full Text](#)

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