

# Getting the Most Out of Your Telehealth Visits

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## What is telehealth?

Telehealth is when a health care provider appointment happens through technology, usually video chat, as illustrated in figure 1. This is a unique service that may be covered by insurance just like a typical health care provider visit without going to the provider's office.<sup>1</sup> By not having to travel, telehealth may be easier than a traditional face-to-face visit, especially for those living with a disability. But telehealth is not perfect. There can be issues. However, with a little bit of preparation, telehealth visits can be successful. The information below will help you prepare for a telehealth appointment.

## Is telehealth right for my needs?

Telehealth is not right for every situation.

## Advantages of telehealth

- Decreases physical contact with others and the spread of germs.
- Allows you to stay in the comfort of your own home.
- Caregivers can participate in your visit.
- No need to set up transportation, saving time and money.
- Allows you access to health care providers outside your neighborhood.
- Easier to fit in your schedule.
- May allow you to be seen sooner and more frequently if needed.

## Disadvantages of telehealth

- You need internet and a device, such as a smartphone, tablet, or computer, with a camera and microphone.
- You may not be comfortable using technology.
- Electronic glitches can happen.
- Full physical examination cannot be done.
- Emergency situations cannot be handled through telehealth.

## How do I prepare for my telehealth visit?

### Prepare your technology

- Find a device with a camera, such as a smartphone, tablet, or computer with a webcam.
- Make sure the application (app) or website your health care provider uses will work on your device. Download the app and register, if needed.
- Test the technology beforehand.
- Find a location for the visit that has a reliable internet connection.

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- Remember to fully charge or plug in your device.<sup>2</sup>

### **Prepare yourself**

- Think about your symptoms and questions for your health care provider. Write them down.
- Have the phone number of the health care provider's office available in case there are issues.
- Have the following things close to you:
  - Pen and paper for taking notes during the appointment.
  - A list of your current medications or medication bottles.
- If you have a caregiver, ask your caregiver to take part in the visit. Caregivers can help with:
  - Providing extra information to the health care provider.
  - Troubleshooting technical issues.
  - Taking notes.
  - Helping the health care provider perform an examination on you (eg, moving your joints).
- If you can, check your weight, pulse, blood pressure, and temperature before the appointment, as your health care provider may need this information.
- Log in to your telehealth appointment 5 minutes early.

### **Prepare the setting**

- Choose a well-lit location with no distractions.
- Get in a position and in clothes that will let you easily be examined.
  - For example, if your foot needs to be examined, make sure you are barefoot and the camera can be adjusted to look at your foot.
- Plan for the visit to take a while. Find a comfortable seat.
- It is best not to hold the device the entire visit. Place the camera in a position so your provider can see you and your caregiver.

### **What should I consider during my telehealth visit?**

- When you log in, you may wait in a "waiting room" until the health care provider is ready to see you.
- Be patient. Your health care provider's previous appointment may have gone longer than expected, so you may have to wait. Your provider will be in soon.
- If waiting too long (about 5 minutes), you may want to call the provider's office.
  - Talk clearly, making sure the health care provider can hear you.
  - Make sure your health care provider can see you through your camera.<sup>3</sup>
  - Let the health care provider know your name and location and introduce anyone with you.
  - Clearly tell the health care provider about your symptoms.
  - Answer the health care provider's questions as clearly and to the point as possible.
  - Check your notes to make sure you have gone over everything with the health care provider.
  - Make notes of the health care provider's recommendations and ask questions if something is unclear.

### **What should I do as my telehealth visit is ending?**

- Tell the health care provider in your own words what you understood to make sure you are both on the same page.
- Know the next steps and follow-up plan.
- If relevant, make sure the health care provider's office knows how to reach you and your pharmacy.

**What if I have technical problems during my telehealth visit?**

- Glitches can happen, and your health care provider will understand.
- If there is a lag, pause after talking to avoid talking over each other.
- If you lose a connection, try to log on again. If you still have problems, call the provider's office.
- Sometimes technical issues don't get solved. In that case, your health care provider's office might reschedule your appointment for a different day.

**What if I have difficulty communicating, remembering, or managing technology?**

- Ask a friend or family member to help you with these things.
- Make sure your questions and concerns are written down ahead of time.
- Take notes during the visit.

**Authorship**

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Figure 1. Illustration of telehealth and recommendations to optimize the experience.