

Getting the Most Out of Your Telehealth Visits

Flora Hammond MD, FACRM, Wendy Waldman, Sheryl Katta-Charles MD, Kyle Littell MD

2021

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.¹ 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.

This is the author's manuscript of the work published in final edited form as:

Hammond, F., Waldman, W., Katta-Charles, S., & Littell, K. (2021). Getting the Most Out of Your Telehealth Visits. *Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation*, 102(2), 345–347.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apmr.2020.10.120>

- Remember to fully charge or plug in your device.²

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.³
 - 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

Developed by Flora Hammond, MD, FACRM (*e-mail address*: flora.Hammond@rhin.com); Wendy Waldman, BSW, CBIST; Sheryl Katta-Charles, MD; and Kyle Littell, MD.

Acknowledgments

This information was created in part as a product of the Chronic Brain Injury Task Force of the American Congress of Rehabilitation Medicine Brain Injury Special Interest Group. Partial support was provided under grants from the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR) (TBI Model Systems at Indiana University School of Medicine Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, Indianapolis, IN, USA, grant #90DRTB0002). The contents of this publication do not necessarily represent the policy of NIDILRR, Administration for Community Living, Department of Health and Human Service, United States, and endorsement by the Federal Government should not be assumed.

Disclaimer

This information is not meant to replace the advice of a medical professional and should not be interpreted as a clinical practice guideline. This Information/Education Page may be reproduced for noncommercial use for health care professionals and other service providers to share with their patients or clients. Any other reproduction is subject to approval by the publisher.

References

1. Medicare telemedicine health care provider fact sheet. Available at: <https://www.cms.gov/newsroom/fact-sheets/medicare-telemedicine-health-care-provider-fact-sheet>. Accessed May 31, 2020.
2. Sharp J. A patient's guide to telemedicine: what to do when your doctor calls or video-chats with you. Available at: <https://www.himss.org/news/patients-guide-telemedicine>. Accessed May 31, 2020.
3. Baig EC. Patient tips for successful virtual health care visits. Available at: <https://www.aarp.org/health/conditions-treatments/info-2020/how-telemedicine-works.html>. Accessed May 31, 2020.



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