

# TELEHEALTH

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Telehealth (or telemedicine) is a term that is used to describe a range of healthcare options that utilize technologies and tools that help to connect patients with their healthcare providers virtually. One common example of telehealth is the use of Zoom or another video-based platform to meet for virtual appointments. Telehealth has shifted how we think about healthcare in the 21st century, turning the focus to patient needs and helping to increase the options as well as access for patients. Many types of healthcare that once required patients to physically travel to their provider can now be accomplished from the comfort of their home with a broadband connection. These changes in how healthcare is administered have greatly reduced the time spent going to doctor's offices, the burden of travel, and have allowed patients to have access to more personalized and specialized care than before. This is a growing field of medicine, and the types of care being offered virtually are continually growing to now include clinical health care, health-related education, health administration, public health, chronic pain management, mental health services and prescription management.

## Benefits to telehealth

Telehealth offers many advantages to patients over traditional in-person healthcare appointments. One advantage is that it is incredibly convenient to connect virtually, no longer needing to physically travel to appointments. For people who have limited or reduced mobility this can greatly lower the burden of travel. Reducing the amount of time spent in doctor's offices also can lower the risk of potentially becoming sick. By utilizing telehealth resources, patients are afforded greater freedom over the types of healthcare they have access to, creating a more equitable, patient-centered approach to healthcare. No longer are patients limited to healthcare providers in their geographic area, as telehealth allows much greater independence in choosing providers that meet their specific needs. Therefore, telehealth can be a great tool for getting specialized care by the best doctors in that specific field. Oftentimes, telehealth also gives patients more access to their provider, as they may have more flexibility and alternative means of contact than traditional doctors' office visits.

## How to get started with telehealth

Telehealth is a blanket term used to describe a variety of ways for patients to access healthcare via technology. Therefore, there is not a one-size-fits-all for how to approach telehealth, but one place to start would be by talking with your current healthcare provider and asking if they offer telehealth options. Talking with your current primary care physician or specialized doctor about the telehealth options they offer would be a great place to start because it would reduce the amount of time and effort to find a new provider. If this option does not work, there are a plethora of websites and companies that focus solely on telehealth. In order to find a telehealth provider that your insurance will cover, you can contact your provider and ask what telehealth options are covered in your insurance policy. Once you have set up a virtual appointment, it is important that you have a device that has both audio and video capabilities as well as having access to a strong and reliable internet connection.

## Emergency hotlines

In case you or someone you know is facing a medical emergency, here is a list of hotlines that can provide immediate assistance:

- Medical Emergency: **911**
- Suicide and Crisis Line: **988**
- Disaster Distress Helpline: **1-800-985-5990**
- National Maternal Mental Health Hotline: **1-833-TLC-MAMA (1-833-852-6262)**
- Poison Help Hotline: **1-800-222-1222**
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's National Helpline: **1-800-662-HELP (1-800-662-4357)**

## **Telehealth FAQ and hints**

### **Will using Telehealth resources save me time?**

Yes, telehealth visits can save you a considerable amount of time because you do not have to drive back-and-forth between clinics or spend time in a waiting room.

### **Will telehealth cost more money than my normal doctor's visits?**

No, telehealth visits usually cost the same amount as an in-person visit. Ask your provider about out-of-pocket payments, when the payment is due, and how to pay your copay. It is possible that you would be able to pay the day of your appointment rather than waiting for the bill to arrive by mail.

### **Will Medicare cover telehealth?**

It should! Your provider is required to get your consent prior to beginning a telehealth visit, so that can be worked out ahead of time.

### **Can others join me on my telehealth call?**

You should always ask your healthcare provider if they allow family members or care givers to join the call. If they do, this can be a great and easy opportunity to have an extra set of eyes and ears during your virtual visit.

### **What kind of device will I need to begin a virtual telehealth appointment?**

In most cases, you will simply need a device that has audio capabilities (speaker and microphone) and video capabilities (webcam/camera). Most modern smartphones and/or laptops would work perfectly for telehealth visits.

### **Where should I participate in my telehealth visit?**

The ideal location for your visit is up to you. It is preferable that you have a private and quiet space for your visit. If you need to attend your visit in a public space, you should consider wearing headphones to protect your privacy.

### **Do not multitask while attending your telehealth visit.**

You should not be distracted, rather devote your full attention to your healthcare provider to get the most out of your visit. Treat telehealth the same way you would treat an in-person doctor visit.

### **Make a list**

It is a good practice to make a list of topics that you wish to discuss with your provider prior to attending the visit.

### **How long do most telehealth calls last?**

It depends upon your provider. Once you connect with your provider, you should ask them how much time you have available with them.

### **Make sure you are in-frame**

Once you have connected on the call, take a moment to make sure that you are positioned appropriately in the camera frame. Can the provider see your entire face? If you are unsure, ask your provider if they can see and hear you.

### **What should I do if I experience technical difficulties?**

If anything goes wrong or is not working during the video call (video is glitchy, you cannot hear or understand your provider) let your provider or care team know.

### Will I be able to acquire records for my telehealth visit?

Yes, you should be able to acquire records, treatment plans or summaries of your visits. Be sure to ask your provider about the methods they use to get you a copy of these records.

### Healthcare reminders

**Bring a friend.** If you have difficulty remembering, request that you bring someone along to your visit. While you are meeting with your provider, take notes about important changes and ask your provider to give you records of their changes or new recommendations.

**Report any falls.** Each year, 29.5 percent of Tennesseans over the age of 65 fall.

Always report falls. By not reporting a fall, you are denying yourself the opportunity to find out the reason behind your fall and to see what steps can be taken to avoid future falls.

**Track your symptoms.** Be sure to always write down in an app or on a notepad any new symptoms as they develop so that you can discuss them with your provider.

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