

Telemedicine Guide for Patients



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Telemedicine Today

The field of telemedicine is changing faster than ever before. As technology advances at exponential levels, so does the widespread affordability and accessibility to basic telemedicine tools.

Telemedicine was originally created to treat patients who were in remote places or in areas lacking medical professionals. While telemedicine is still used today to address these problems, it's increasingly becoming a tool for convenient medical care.

With the wide variety of mobile health apps and new mobile medical devices that are consumer-friendly, patients are also starting to use technology to monitor and track their health. Simple home-use medical devices that can take vitals and diagnose ear infections, monitor glucose levels, or measure blood pressure let patients gather needed medical information for a doctor's diagnosis, without going into the doctor's office.



Advantages of Telemedicine

More convenient, accessible care for patients.

Telemedicine was originally developed in the U.S. to address care shortages, especially in remote rural areas. Now telemedicine is used around the world. Telemedicine has the power to make the entire healthcare delivery model more convenient to patients.

Saves on healthcare costs.

The U.S. spends more than \$2.9 trillion on healthcare every year. An estimated \$200 billion of those costs are unnecessary and avoidable. Telemedicine has the power to cut our healthcare spending by reducing problems such as unnecessary ER visits and making typical doctor visits more efficient.

Extends access to consults from specialists.

With telemedicine, a medical practice or hospital system can immediately expand access to niche medical specialists. This makes it easy for primary care doctors to consult medical specialists on a patient's case, and for patients to see a needed specialist no matter their location.

Increases patient engagement.

Telemedicine engages patients by allowing them to connect with their doctor more frequently, in a convenient way. That means more questions asked and answered, a stronger doctor-patient relationship, and patients who feel empowered to manage their care.

Better quality patient care.

Telemedicine makes it easier for providers to follow-up with patients and make sure everything is going well. Whether they're using a more extensive remote patient monitoring system to watch the patient's heart or doing a video chat to answer medication questions after a hospital discharge – telemedicine leads to better care outcomes.

Challenges of Telemedicine

Requires technical training and equipment.

Like most technology solutions, telemedicine platforms usually require some training and equipment purchases.

May reduce in-person interactions with doctors.

Some critics argue that physical exams are often necessary to make a full diagnosis. In-person patient-doctor visits are clearly valuable and necessary in many circumstances. Telemedicine is best used to supplement these visits.

Common Telemedicine Services

Telemedicine can be used for a wide variety of health services. Here's a short list of common conditions and services where a doctor may treat via telemedicine:

- Allergies
- Arthritic Pain
- Asthma
- Behavioral Health
- Bladder Infections
- Cellulitis
- Chronic Bronchitis
- Colds and Flu
- Conjunctivitis
- Diabetes
- Diarrhea
- Hypertension
- Infections
- Insect Bites
- Mental Illness
- Pharyngitis
- Prevention Services
- Rashes
- Respiratory Infections
- Sinusitis
- Skin Inflammations
- Sore Throats
- Sprains and Strains
- Urinary Tract Infections
- Vomiting



Telemedicine should not be used for any condition where an in-person exam is required because of severe symptoms, certain protocol-driven procedures, or aggressive interventions.

PLEASE NOTE: For a medical emergency, always call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room.

Preparing for a Telemedicine Visit

To take full advantage of your telehealth visit and to help the provider evaluate your condition, there are several steps you can take to prepare:

1. Make a list of your current symptoms, when they started, how severe they are, and if they have changed.
2. Are others in your home ill? If so, for how long?
3. Make a list of any chronic conditions you have and list any medications you are on. Have the prescriptions in front of you in case they need to be verified or discussed. Also have your pharmacy information on hand.
4. Have you been tested for COVID-19? If so, what were the results?
5. Have a list of the names and locations of any hospitals and specialists that have treated you since your last visit. Have your medical record number or other identifying information available.
6. In case you are asked to go to the Emergency Room or clinic, make sure you know the location of the closest one.

Also in preparation, make sure your technology is ready:

1. Are you going to use your phone, tablet, or computer for the visit?
2. Make sure you have a reliable internet connection and that your device is fully charged or plugged in.
3. Download any apps or create an account on a telemedicine website that your provider may instruct you to use. Familiarize yourself with the app or website.
4. Make sure you have a quiet and comfortable place to sit for the visit with good lighting so that your camera gives a clear view of you for the provider.
5. Have paper and a pen ready to take notes during the call.
6. Check in for your visit at least ten minutes prior to your appointment time. Be aware that there may be a high volume of calls, so you may have to wait to be connected. Also, be patient. The provider may be seeing another patient and be delayed.

Overall, a virtual visit is similar to visiting a doctor's office, but a bit more preparation is helpful. You may receive notes from your call through your patient portal. If you have a portal for this provider, check it after the call to review any recommendations.