



American Society for
Gastrointestinal Endoscopy

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) About Telehealth

Q1: What is telehealth or telemedicine?

A1: Telehealth and telemedicine are terms that are often used interchangeably. Although they are not exactly the same, the main concept is that they involve delivery of health care services using electronic communications when health care providers and patients are geographically separated (not in the same place). During a typical telehealth encounter, you communicate directly ("face to face") with your health care provider via a live audio/video meeting so they can manage your care remotely when an in-person office visit is not possible. Telehealth allows you to access health care from the safety of your own home during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Q2: What do I need to participate in a telehealth visit?

A2: You will need a device with the capacity for real-time audio/video communication. These devices may include: 1) a desktop or laptop computer with speakers, a microphone and a camera, 2) a smartphone or 3) a tablet device. Make sure you have access to a strong internet connection or cellular signal. In some cases, you may need to download a software application (an "app") on your device to allow for secure communication with your medical provider. Check with your provider for information and guidance about their telehealth opportunities.

Q3: Can I participate in telehealth without a video screen?

A3: No, a telehealth visit requires both audio and visual communication as your provider cannot complete a visual physical exam without video. Your provider may be able

to answer questions with an audio-only phone call, but this would not be a formal telehealth visit.

Q4: Can I have a telehealth visit with a provider that I have never seen before?

A4: Yes, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, telehealth visits could only be offered to patients with an already established relationship with the provider. During the pandemic, however, new regulations allow health care providers to offer both initial and follow-up telehealth visits.

Q5: Are there any downsides to telehealth visits?

A5: Perhaps the main downside is that your provider can only perform a visual physical exam. If you have a condition that requires a manual physical examination (such as to examine your abdomen), your provider may need to see you in person. Also, telehealth does not allow for certain treatments that you may need, such as injections and infusions.

Q6: How do I prepare for my telehealth visit?

A6: Your provider's office should contact you before your visit with instructions on what digital platform is needed to connect to your provider. They will also tell you how to download a software application ("app"), if one is required to establish telehealth with their practice. Some of these applications require you to 'enable' your microphone and camera within your device, while others do this automatically or give you an onscreen prompt you just click on.



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Q7: Will my telehealth visit be HIPAA compliant?

A7: Your provider takes measures to ensure that your personal health information remains protected. In general, providers are required to use technologies and digital platforms that are compliant with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). Digital platforms such as FaceTime or Skype are not HIPAA compliant, but these might be the only available option for real-time audio/video communications for some patients and providers. During the COVID-19 pandemic, a nationwide public health emergency, the Health and Human Services Office for Civil Rights, and many states, are allowing delivery of some telehealth encounters using platforms such as FaceTime and Skype.

Q8: Will my provider be at home or at the office for the telehealth visit?

A8: During the COVID-19 pandemic, your provider can be at home, in their office, or even at another location (such as the hospital) during the telehealth visit with you.

Q9: Do I need to be at home for my telehealth visit?

A9: No, patients can be seen anywhere, as long as they have a suitable device and access to the internet or a cellular network.

Q10: Will my health insurance cover a telehealth visit? Will there be a copayment (co-pay)?

A10: Most insurance plans are currently covering telehealth visits with the same co-pay that you would

have had if you were seen for a face-to-face visit with the physician in the office. In addition, some insurance companies have allowed flexibility in the collection of co-pays or co-insurance for these visits. Because you may have a co-pay, staff will ask you to verbally consent to have this service.

Q11: Will my provider be able to order tests and prescribe medications?

A11: Yes, your telehealth visit allows your provider to do almost everything he or she would do at an in-person office visit, including documentation in your electronic medical record, ordering tests, and prescribing medications. Some things, such as prescriptions for medications, can be sent electronically to your pharmacy. Your provider may need to send certain orders or paper prescriptions to you either via electronic means or by mail.

Q12: Are there other options of insurance-covered services that don't involve video?

A12: Yes, during the emergency, Medicare is allowing coverage for telephone services for new and established patients, and Medicare has covered a variety of simpler 'virtual check-in' and 'e-visits' conducted by brief telephone call, or portal discussions with your provider. These aren't just simple phone-backs to get test results or asking staff for appointments or simple questions, which remain 'free services,' but are intended for you to give your provider an update on your conditions.



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