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Telehealth: What Is It, How to Prepare, Is It Covered?

[Español](#)

What Is Telehealth?

Telehealth is a service that uses video calling and other technologies to help you see your doctor or other health care provider from home instead of at a medical facility. Telehealth may be particularly helpful for older adults with limited mobility and for those living in rural areas, as they will have the opportunity to see and talk with their doctor from their home. For older adults, talking with their doctor online, through a phone, tablet, or other electronic device, can often be easier, faster, and less expensive than making a trip to an office.

Telehealth can also help support family caregivers who are taking care of their loved ones either close by or from afar. If a caregiver needs to ask the doctor a question, they can do so through an online health portal rather than waiting for and traveling to an in-person appointment.

Telehealth and telemedicine are two different types of online health care services. Telemedicine refers specifically to online doctor visits, while telehealth also includes health-related education services like diabetes management or nutrition courses and health-related training.

How to Prepare for a Telehealth Appointment: Tips for Older Adults

The transition from in-person to online appointments can be difficult for some people, especially those who are not familiar with the technology. By taking a few minutes before your appointment to [prepare](#), you can set yourself up for a more successful visit.

- **Add online appointments to your calendar.** Once your appointment is confirmed, add it to your calendar so you don't forget.
- **Try to use the best camera you can find.** This may be attached to your phone, laptop, tablet, or desktop computer. A clear picture can help your doctor understand and address your concerns more easily and effectively.
- **Test the camera in advance.** Practice in advance with a family member or a friend to make sure you understand how to use your camera when you have your online visit with your doctor.
- **Test the sound and video on your device.** Most devices have built-in microphones and speakers, but you may have to turn them on or enable the telehealth software or website to access them. Video calling a friend before your appointment can help ensure that everything is working properly. Using headphones or earbuds may make it easier for you to hear your doctor and for your doctor to hear you, but it's good to test these out first to see what works best.

- **Use the best internet connection possible.** If you are not using Wi-Fi, try getting the best signal by using a wired connection to your router or an Ethernet cable. If you are using Wi-Fi, being physically close to the internet router and minimizing devices connected to it can help improve your connection.
- **Charge your device.** If you are using a wireless device, like a phone, laptop, or tablet, check to make sure your battery is charged enough to last through your appointment. Try charging it the night before your appointment.
- **Find a quiet space and adjust lighting.** Limit distractions and clutter in your space. Try finding a place with good lighting so your doctor can see you properly.
- **Position yourself.** Place your device on a sturdy surface so you can move around if you need to. Try positioning your device so your head and shoulders are in the camera frame.
- **Prepare a list of questions/concerns.** Being [prepared for your appointment](#) will help make it easier for you and your doctor to cover everything you need to talk about.

Are Telehealth Appointments Covered by Insurance?

Many insurance providers, including Medicaid and some private insurers, are beginning to cover telehealth services. However, telehealth coverage [varies widely from state to state](#) with differences in how telehealth is defined and paid for. Because insurance coverage policies differ, it's important to check with insurance providers or your health care provider's billing department directly for the latest information about coverage for telehealth services.

Will Medicare Cover My Telehealth Appointment?

If you are enrolled in Medicare Part B, certain telehealth services, like doctor's visits, outpatient care, medical supplies, and preventive services may be covered.

The specific amount you will owe may depend on several factors, including:

- Other insurance you may have
- How much your doctor charges
- The type of facility
- Where you get your test, item, or service



Medicare also covers [virtual check-ins](#) and [E-visits](#).

Medicare Advantage Plans are a type of Medicare health plan offered by a private company that contracts with Medicare to provide Part A and Part B benefits. These plans may offer more telehealth benefits than Original Medicare.

Medicare plans are constantly changing and updating. Check with your provider to see what telehealth benefits are offered for your plan.

Learn more about [Medicare and telehealth services](#).

Online Clinical Research Assessments and Trials

Are you involved in a [clinical trial](#) or considering [participating in research](#)? Typically, clinical trials require in-person visits. However, some clinical trials are conducting initial surveys or tests for research online, while some studies and trials are being conducted entirely online. Conducting clinical studies online can help encourage people to

participate. Online clinical trials help eliminate travel time to trial sites and allow patients to participate from the comfort of their own home. This is increasingly beneficial for older adults who have limited mobility.

Find a clinical trial that works for you using the [Clinical Trials Finder](#) or [ClinicalTrials.gov](#).

You may also be interested in

- Learning [five ways to get the most out of your doctor's visit](#)
- Reading about [what you need to tell your doctor](#)
- Finding out [how to prepare for a doctor's appointment](#)

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For more information about telehealth services

Medicare

800-633-4227

877-486-2048 (TTY)

www.cms.gov

www.medicare.gov

Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality

301-427-1364

info@ahrq.hhs.gov

www.ahrq.gov

The Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC)

202-690-7151

onc.request@hhs.gov

<https://www.healthit.gov/>

Medicaid

877-267-2323

866-226-1819 (TTY)

Medicaid.gov@cms.hhs.gov

www.medicaid.gov

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