

# Telehealth and Parkinson's



**Telehealth or telemedicine is when healthcare providers deliver care for their patients remotely and are not physically present with one another. This technology allows for real-time information sharing by computer or phone. Telemedicine appointments are becoming an ever-increasing part of healthcare. Studies show that care delivered through telemedicine is as good as care delivered at a medical center. Additionally, some people have reported preferring telemedicine because they feel more at ease in the comfort of their own home.**

## Reasons to Use Telemedicine

Virtual appointments are convenient, allowing people at any stage of Parkinson's to connect with their doctor through audio and/or video from anywhere. Through telemedicine, a movement disorder specialist can treat and address most Parkinson's symptoms, adjust medications, assess the disease's progression and recommend additional therapies. In fact, according to the Parkinson's Foundation's COVID-19 Survey, 46% of people who used telehealth prefer to keep using it after the pandemic — indicating that telehealth may be a great complement to in-person care.

While telemedicine can never fully replace the benefits of in-person appointments, there are many benefits to telemedicine:

- No need to travel or arrange transportation
- Helps those struggling with fatigue
- Less time spent going to and from appointments
- Often a more casual tone
- Ability for providers to assess home safety and make changes in real time

### Types of Appointments

Telemedicine appointments can be made for almost any type of medical appointment. Physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, mental health services and some neurology appointments are just a few examples of appointments that can be done virtually.

In many instances, the health professional will rely on a video camera or a web cam to properly

conduct the appointment, requiring an Internet connection. Many appointments can be completed by ensuring the health professional can see and hear you clearly.

Of course, there may be instances where specific tests or appointments need to be done in person. Discuss with your doctor what can be done virtually, what needs to be done in-person and what can wait to be done in the office.

If you have a DBS system, it may have a feature that allows your physician to perform tests, routine check-ups and adjust levels to treat symptoms without requiring a hospital visit. Ask your physician if this is possible for your DBS system.

### Participating in Telemedicine without a Computer or Internet

There may be ways to get the necessary care if you do not have access to a computer or the Internet. If you do not have a computer but do have a smartphone with video capability, you can use it to meet virtually with your doctor. You will need to prop up and stabilize your phone (using a countertop, an easel or another method) so that your doctor can see you properly.

If you do not have access to a computer or a smartphone, contact your local Area Agency on Aging and ask if they have computers or tablets you can use. You can find the nearest location by calling **1-800-677-1116**. If you do not have an Area Agency on Aging near you or cannot find similar resources, you can call **2-1-1** and ask for resource suggestions.

## Preparing for a Telemedicine Appointment

Here are ten tips to help you prepare for your next telemedicine appointment:

1. **Get ready.** Prepare as you would for an in-person visit. Make sure you have your medication list handy and write your list of questions you would like to ask.
2. **Review medication.** Check to see if you have enough pills at home or if you need refills. Remember to try to have a 90-day supply on-hand.
3. **Download communication software.** You will most likely use a video platform like Zoom, FaceTime, Skype, Epic or others. Your healthcare specialist will let you know which program or application to download ahead of time.
4. **Check technology.** Make sure you set up in a location with a good Internet connection. Charge your device before the appointment starts or try to keep it plugged in.
5. **Be ready to move.** Try to position yourself near a space where you can perform typical tasks your doctor or specialist may ask you to complete. For instance, a Movement Disorder Specialist or physical therapist may ask you to walk. It may be helpful to have a family member ready to help during the appointment.
6. **Gather your tools.** Have a paper and pen nearby, along with any items your healthcare specialist may have asked you to bring to your appointment (for instance, a thermometer, scale, medication bottles).
7. **Prepare your space:**
  - Speak in your normal voice
  - Do not place papers or objects near the microphone. Put your phone on silent if you are not using it for the appointment.
  - Limit any clutter between you and the camera
  - Avoid backlighting (like windows behind you)
  - Limit background noise that may come from a TV, radio, pets or affect your device's microphone (a fan overhead, loud AC unit, open window)
8. **Ask questions.** Take notes and add them to your medical file.
9. **Provide updates.** Your pharmacy, insurance or contact information may have changed. Let the doctor's office know before your appointment ends.
10. **Talk about follow up care.** Schedule your next appointment if possible.

## Conclusions

For more information on telemedicine, visit [Parkinson.org/PDHealth](https://www.parkinson.org/PDHealth) to view past Wellness Wednesday episodes focused on Telehealth, including "Ask the Expert: How Can I Benefit from Telemedicine?" and "Wearable Technology and Telemedicine Post-COVID 19." As always, you can also call our Helpline at 1-800-4PD-INFO (473-4636).

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