Telehealth and Parkinson's



Telehealth or telemedicine is when healthcare providers deliver health-related services and information using technology. Telemedicine appointments are becoming an ever-increasing part of healthcare. In addition, studies show that care delivered through telemedicine is as good as care delivered at a medical center. In fact, some people prefer telemedicine appointments 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 disease (PD) to meet with their doctor from anywhere using a smartphone, tablet, or computer with internet access. Through telemedicine, a movement disorder specialist (neurologists with additional training in Parkinson's) can treat and address most Parkinson's symptoms, adjust medications, assess the disease's progression and recommend additional therapies.

According to a Parkinson's Foundation COVID-19 survey, 46% of people who started using telehealth during the pandemic hope to have this option in the future — indicating that telehealth may be a great complement to in-person care. While telemedicine can never fully replace all the benefits of in-person appointments, there are many benefits to telemedicine:

- No need to arrange transportation
- Less time spent going to and from appointments and in waiting rooms
- Helps those struggling with fatigue
- Reduces exposure to other people's germs and viruses
- More casual than the doctor's office
- Helps providers assess home safety and make changes in real time
- Provides access to specialists not available locally

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 most cases, the health professional will rely on video in addition to audio to properly conduct the appointment, requiring a strong internet connection.

Of course, there may be instances where specific tests or appointments need to be done in person. Discuss with you doctor what can be done virtually and in-person. If you have a deep brain stimulation (DBS) system, it may have a feature that allows your physician to perform tests and 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 WiFi

There may be ways to get the necessary care if you do not have access to a computer or WiFi. A smartphone with video capability can be used to meet virtually with your doctor. Check your cellular data plan and usage to avoid overage fees. You will need to prop up and stabilize your phone 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

Notes

Here are 10 tips to help you prepare for your next telemedicine appointment:

- **1. Get ready.** Prepare a list of questions and symptoms before your appointment. Consider inviting a family member or friend to help take notes and for extra support.
- **2. Review medication.** Check to see if you have enough pills at home or if you need refills. Make a list of all of your medications for Parkinson's and for other conditions. To download a medication form, visit **Parkinson.org/MedForm**.
- **3. Download communication software.** Ask your healthcare provider which video platform or application you will need to download ahead of time.
- **4. Check technology.** Make sure you have a good internet connection. Charge your device before the appointment or try to keep it plugged in.
- **5. Be ready to move.** Give yourself room to move. For instance, your movement disorder specialist or physical therapist might ask you to walk or perform another task.
- **6. Gather your tools.** Have paper and a pen nearby, along with any items your healthcare specialist may have asked you to bring to your appointment (thermometer, scale, medication bottles, etc.).

7. Prepare your space.

- 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 from a TV, AC unit, pets or an open window.
- **8. Take notes.** For future reference, write down any important information or suggestions your health care provider shares with you.
- **9. Provide updates.** Let the doctor's office know if your pharmacy, insurance or contact information has changed.
- **10. Talk about follow up care.** Schedule your next appointment if possible.

Conclusions

For more information on telemedicine, visit Parkinson.org/TelemedicineTips

We're here for you. Call our Helpline at 1-800-4PD-INFO (473-4636).

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