



Making the Most of Your Telehealth Visit

What is telemedicine?

“Telemedicine” is a type of medicine that uses telecommunication technologies (like the phone or internet) to deliver care to a patient at a distant site.

What is telehealth?

“Telehealth” is a broad term that covers the use of the phone and internet technologies to provide health care. It can include virtual health care visits, remote monitoring of heart rate and blood pressure, and providing health education over the internet. Although telehealth has been around for a while now, it has become more common during the COVID-19 pandemic.

What are the benefits of telehealth?

- ⦿ It maximizes your contact with your health care team.
- ⦿ It’s convenient—you don’t have to change your schedule or travel to your health care professional’s office.
- ⦿ It’s quick—you’re often done in less time than an in-person visit would take.
- ⦿ It’s private—you can talk to your health care professional in a location that feels comfortable to you—your home, office, and even your car.

Will I also have in-person visits during my pregnancy?

- ⦿ Yes! Telehealth is often combined with in-person care. You may have all telehealth visits for the first few weeks of pregnancy and all in-person visits later in pregnancy, or you may go back and forth between telehealth and in-person visits.
- ⦿ Telehealth visits often focus on health education, screening for mental health disorders, and lifestyle counseling.
- ⦿ Telehealth appointments are just as important as in-person appointments; they are part of the “whole package” of health care.
- ⦿ Electronic health care portals are often part of the telehealth experience. They also provide a convenient way to keep in touch with your health care team.

How should I get ready for a telehealth visit?

- ⦿ You should receive instructions beforehand about how to connect to your visit.
- ⦿ Make sure you download any links that are sent to you for connecting to the telehealth appointment.
- ⦿ Check your internet connection or cellular service to ensure that you have good reception. Also, check your monitor and camera to make sure they’re working.
- ⦿ Some offices allow you to practice beforehand with a staff member—just ask.
- ⦿ Make a list of your medications or check your medication list on the health care portal before your visit to make sure it’s up to date.
- ⦿ Choose a quiet, private place to have your telehealth visit. Can you find someone to keep an eye on your younger children for a short time? Can you give them something quiet to do while you have your visit?
- ⦿ Make a list of questions that you want to ask your health care professional.
- ⦿ If you have been checking your blood pressure, weight, or blood sugar at home, have those results ready to share with your health care professional.
- ⦿ Think about asking someone to be on the call with you to take notes.
- ⦿ Have the phone number of the office handy in case you are cut off and need to get re-connected.
- ⦿ If you prefer speaking to your health care professional in a different language besides English, ask in advance for an interpreter in the language you prefer.

During the call

- ⦿ It’s important to be on time for your appointment. You usually don’t have to wait for your health care professional to join.
- ⦿ Try not to “multitask”—this is your time with your health care professional, and you want to make the most of it.

- ⦿ Jot down answers to the questions you have prepared or have your support person take notes.
- ⦿ Make sure all of your questions are answered.
- ⦿ Ask about next steps.
- ⦿ Make sure you know whom to call or where to go to make any follow-up appointments—remember that you are not in the doctor’s office and you won’t be “stopping by” the receptionist desk to make a follow-up appointment.

After the call

- ⦿ Take advantage of your health care professional’s portal if they have one. Use it for messaging, prescriptions, and scheduling follow-up visits. You may need to ask for a code or other sign-up link from the office.
- ⦿ If you had any problems connecting during the visit, let the office staff know. They need to hear about issues so that they can correct them.

Are telehealth visits covered by insurance?

- ⦿ In most cases, your telehealth visit will be covered by your insurance.
- ⦿ Some insurance companies cover video telehealth visits only, while others may cover both video and telephone visits. Before your planned telehealth visit, check with your insurance to find out if your telehealth visit will be covered, and if it needs to be a video visit.
- ⦿ Insurance companies may change what they cover or may have different plans with different coverage or deductibles. Some insurance companies added coverage for telehealth during the COVID-19 pandemic but may not cover it in the future.

To find a maternal-fetal medicine subspecialist in your area, go to <https://www.smfm.org/members/search>.