Telemedicine is a useful service that connects people with physicians when in-person visits may not be feasible. Telemedicine digitally delivers healthcare services to patients using technologic devices like computers and smartphones. It allows patients to see and talk to their providers without physically being in the office. Common uses of telemedicine include follow up visits, chronic disease management, consultations, medication management, and other useful services.

Telemedicine has grown significantly in recent years and has become even more important during the COVID-19 pandemic. Telemedicine appointments allow patients to avoid crowded waiting rooms and practice social distancing when infection rates may be surging. People are also able to avoid the need to drive, take the bus, or take other forms of transportation.

**Is telemedicine effective?**

Telemedicine is both beneficial and effective for specific services. Clinical outcomes with telemedicine are as good as in-person visits for certain services like behavioral health therapy, counseling patients with chronic conditions, and home monitoring for patients with chronic conditions. Recent studies found that telemedicine also improves access to care, reduced wait times, and faster treatment. While telemedicine is useful for specific services, there are still appointments that do need to take place at the doctor’s office or hospital like blood work, imaging tests, and physical exams. Talk to your doctor about what can and can’t be done via telemedicine.

**Is telemedicine covered by insurance?**

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS) expanded coverage for people to receive telemedicine access during the COVID-19 public health emergency. These temporary expanded services allowed people to access health care services from home, across state lines, and see new doctors if needed. In November 2021, CMS approved continued coverage for certain telehealth services through December 2023. Some of these services include phone based mental health services, cardiac rehabilitation codes, and the expansion of outpatient pulmonary rehabilitation services under Part B for those hospitalized or infected with COVID-19.

A full list of expanded services can be viewed online.
How can I prepare for a telemedicine appointment?

Most telemedicine visits require some type of video ability. Any device that has audio-video capabilities and an internet connection can be used. Devices include smartphones, computers, or tablets. After the appointment is scheduled, you'll receive directions to log on for your visit. The physician will start the visit with a few questions to confirm your identity and will then move on to the main reason for the visit.

To prepare for a telemedicine visit, follow these tips:

1. Write down your questions and concerns beforehand
2. If you have an informal family caregiver, ask them to be available and join you for your appointment
3. Test drive your equipment (computer, tablet, phone) before the appointment
4. Find a quiet spot with plenty of light to take the appointment
5. Be prepared to tell your provider about your family and medical history
6. Have as many of your vital numbers on hand as possible (weight, temperature, blood pressure, etc.)
7. Try to be specific when describing symptoms or signs
8. Have pen and paper handy to write down any important notes
9. Have all your medications or a current medication list within reach during the appointment

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