

Practise: Make sure you practise using the video calling software before your teleconsultation. Ask your friend or family member to send you a link to join a call with them. This is the same way you will join a call with your doctor.

Get help with technology if needed: It can be reassuring to have someone who is comfortable with technology nearby to help you if you need it while you are doing a video consultation. They could be outside your window. If they are there, make sure they follow COVID-19 guidelines.

Help from a family member or caregiver: You may like a family member or caregiver to join you. On a video call, the doctor can see and hear both of you. On a phone call, you can use the loud speaker so both of you can speak and hear. Make sure your doctor knows that you will have company and explain what their relationship is to you.

Have questions and pen and paper ready: Write down questions you want to ask before the call. Don't feel in a rush to finish. This is your opportunity to ask questions and discuss your needs. Your health provider is there to help you, as they would be if you saw them in person.

Sometimes it's easy to forget all the details you hear in a call. It's OK to say "Can I write that down?"

Have technology ready: Make sure:

- your phone is charged
- you have reception from your provider or a good internet connection
- you are comfortable with the technology if video calling
- your phone volume suits you.

Medical notes: Have your medical notes and medicines to hand. You should also have the name and address of your GP and your pharmacist in case your hospital doctor needs to send them a report or a prescription.

What to expect during a telemedicine consultation

Waiting room: Just like an in person consultation, your doctor or nurse might be a little delayed or late. In a video consultation, you may be placed in a "virtual waiting room". This means your side of the call is connected and you are waiting for your doctor to join you.

Silence: Don't worry if your doctor or nurse is silent for a while. They will need time to look up things or make notes. They should explain what they are doing, but if they don't, it's OK to ask "Are you still there?". Don't feel you need to fill a silence like you would when you call a friend.

The consultation: The discussion you have with your doctor or nurse will probably be similar to a normal consultation. There might be some differences. For example, if you use home spirometry (breathing test), the doctor might ask you to blow while you are on the call and to share your result.

Prescriptions: Your doctor will still be able to prescribe your medicines and oxygen. The way in which they do this can differ depending on your circumstances. For example, they can write to your pharmacist, or, if you need something quickly, they can send an email.

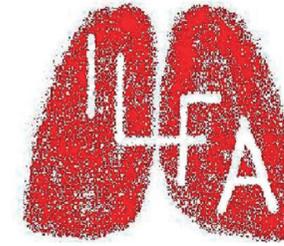
See also our leaflet called "Getting the most out of your hospital appointments".

Review date 2024



Irish Lung Fibrosis Association

Charitable exemption number: CHY 15462
Registered charity number: 20053437
Company registration number: 367940



Irish Lung Fibrosis Association

Telemedicine: Phone and video consultations

A guide for patients

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This guide tells you all about telemedicine. It includes its advantages, disadvantages, giving your consent (agreement), what you will need to get ready and how to take part in a telemedicine consultation.

What is telemedicine?

Telemedicine is the use of technology by a healthcare professional to provide medical services and healthcare. It includes telephone and video consultations (appointments) with a doctor or nurse, and even things like online pulmonary rehabilitation classes with a physiotherapist. Knowing how to use telemedicine will help you to continue to receive your healthcare safely from a distance. To be able to attend a telemedicine consultation, you'll need to have a phone (audio only) or a smartphone, tablet or computer (audio and video).

Advantages

Keeps you safe: Telemedicine allows a healthcare professional to provide services to you without the need to see you in person. It has become popular during the COVID-19 pandemic, as it can keep you and healthcare staff safe.

Convenient: There are other advantages too – such as being more convenient for patients, and more efficient for hospitals and clinics.

Your doctor or nurse will consider whether telemedicine is appropriate for you. You might have a phone consultation with your doctor first to help decide.

Disadvantages

Your facial expressions and body language may not be seen: If you have a telephone consultation without video, facial expressions and body language signals are lost. You will need to speak up and say things like “Can you repeat that?” or “I’m not sure I understand”.

Other clues may not be seen: Video consultations can be better than phone calls for reading facial expressions,

but they still don't allow your healthcare professional to see more subtle things. Small changes in your physical appearance can be clues to your health such as the colour of your lips or your fingernails. Tell your doctor instead about anything unusual that you have noticed since your last appointment. Taking and sharing photos can be helpful.

Harder to include caregivers and family members: Use the loud speaker on your phone to include others in the conversation.

Doesn't allow for some tests: There are some tests you can't do from home. These include chest x-rays and lung function tests.

May stop some people from asking questions: Healthcare professionals worry that their patients don't always ask questions or chat as they would normally, particularly if patients get breathless on the phone. Always take your time and get your breath back. Slow down your speech if you need to. Feel free to ask questions and talk about your emotions and your general health.

You always need to consent (agree)

Your doctor or nurse should always ask you for your consent to have your consultation using telemedicine, and for any treatment they provide.

They will keep a medical record of your telephone or video consultation.

What happens to your personal data?

Today, a lot of people are using applications (apps) on their phone and other devices to keep track of their health. If your doctor wants you to use a smartphone app that collects information, the app provider should send you a privacy policy to explain how your data (information) is stored and used. Take the time to read this policy before you agree to using an app. If you have any concerns, you can talk to your healthcare provider.

How to take part

Be prepared: Have a notebook and pen ready so you can take notes. Make sure your phone or device is charged and not on silent mode, so you will know when your doctor or nurse is contacting you.

Telephone consultations: Consider what phone number is best to give. If your mobile phone reception isn't good at home, use a landline.

Your healthcare professional will call you at a time you have agreed in advance (just like a normal appointment).

Video consultations: You will receive a letter, email or a text message from your hospital or GP (doctor) with details of how and when to join a video call.

You will need:

- A device like a smartphone, tablet, laptop or computer with a camera, a microphone and speakers.
- A good internet connection. If you can watch a video on your internet connection, you should be able to make a video call.
- A private and well-lit space where you can discuss your medical details comfortably (not in front of a window though).

If you aren't comfortable using video communication, tell your doctor or nurse before the appointment. However, once you have things set-up, you may find that using video calling technology is straight forward.

Here are a few tips:

Get the software: There are a few different types of software used to make video calls, examples include WhatsApp, Zoom and Skype. There are also specialised versions for medical consultations. Your appointment letter or email will normally contain a link to the particular software provider. You will normally need to download the (free) software for that provider to your device first.