What is telemedicine?

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Telemedicine refers to the use of technology to evaluate, diagnose and treat patients remotely. For example, you might have a phone call or Zoom session with your doctor during which you discuss your symptoms and he or she prescribes medication without an office visit. Telemedicine is a good alternative for follow-up visits in which the main goal is to check in about how you are doing. Mental health counseling also can often be done remotely.

You may be able to perform certain tests at home—such as measuring your blood pressure or testing your blood sugar—and relay the data to your doctor to help him or her make a diagnosis. However, you will still need to make in-person visits for some exams and lab tests.

Telemedicine can be more cost effective and convenient than routine office visits, allowing patients to take less time off work and avoid traveling long distances to see a doctor. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it is increasingly used to enable people to shelter in place and avoid spending time in medical facilities where they may be at risk of exposure to the new coronavirus.

Ask your providers about what types of telemedicine services they provide. Read more here about finding a doctor and accessing care.

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