

Virtual Consultations



What are virtual consultations

Virtual consultations are a way of speaking to your doctor, hospital consultant, nurse or other health care professional about your health without having to visit them at their place of work.

Virtual consultations can take place in your own home or somewhere else more suitable, such as at a relative's or friend's house. All you need is access to a telephone, smartphone, tablet or PC and be in a place where you feel able to talk freely and without being disturbed.

Virtual consultations will usually be carried out by telephone but can also be by video call on a smartphone, tablet, or a PC.

Your healthcare professional will let you know how you will be contacted and when. They should tell you what will happen if you are cut off from your consultation and what each of you will do if this happens.

Why are virtual consultations becoming more popular?

Virtual consultations have been around for several years, though not widely used for healthcare appointments. The COVID-19 pandemic has meant we have all needed to practise social distancing so face-to-face medical appointments are often replaced by "virtual" consultations to stop the virus spreading. Virtual consultations are now being used to help improve care for patients and make it quicker and easier to be seen, with more patient care taking place outside of the usual medical settings.

This approach is not about restricting people's access to healthcare professionals. It's about offering the safest and most suitable consultation and improving waiting times for patients. Face-to-face appointments should still be available if you really need one or if a virtual consultation is not right for you. If you would prefer a face-to-face consultation, please let your health professional know.

What makes a successful virtual consultation?

- Find a quiet space where you can sit comfortably without being disturbed and without fear that someone might hear you talking about private issues. Noisy areas will make it harder to hear and could distract you from what is being said.
- Have a pen, paper and glasses to hand so you can write down the main points that are said.
- If you are hard of hearing, visually impaired or would just like some moral support, ask a relative or friend to be with you during your consultation.
- Treat your consultation as a normal medical appointment and prepare for it in the same way as a face-to-face appointment.
- If your appointment is part of a routine follow up, think about the main points you would like to talk about.
- It is helpful to write down any questions you have before your appointment. List your questions with the most important at the top so they are answered first. You can also send your list of questions to your healthcare professional before the consultation so they know what you would like to talk about at your appointment.
- Make a note of all symptoms, even if they are mild, that you have had since your last appointment so you can mention them to your healthcare professional.

• If you are seeking medical advice for something new, be prepared to talk about:

- what the symptoms are
- how long you have had the symptoms
- your medical history
- current medication
- any shop-bought medications or vitamins you have tried

- Do not be afraid to ask questions as you think of them or ask your healthcare professional to repeat things you don't understand.
- You may find it useful to repeat back what has been discussed and any next steps. Your healthcare professional will explain again, or in a different way, if there are things you are unclear about.
- Before your consultation ends, check you have covered all the points you had on your list, what will happen next and when and who to contact if you have any questions or concerns.

Virtual consultation by telephone

- If your consultation is by telephone, your healthcare professional or a member of their team will check the best telephone number to contact you on before the day of your appointment.
- You will receive your telephone call as close to the time of your appointment as possible. Don't worry if your call does not take place at the exact time it was arranged for. You will be called as soon as the healthcare professional is free.
- If you will be using a mobile telephone, make sure it is fully charged before the call takes place, so you don't get cut off.
- Turn off notifications on your mobile phone so you are not disturbed during the call.
- Speak with your healthcare professional at the start of your call about what will happen if you are cut off and what each of you will do if this should happen. This will ensure the session can restart as quickly and easily as possible.
- If your call is unable to restart, a new appointment will be set up for another time.

Virtual consultation by video call

- Virtual consultations by video call should be fully secure and private and not able to be accessed by those who are not involved in your care.
- Video consultations can take place using your smartphone, tablet or PC.

- It is often easier for your healthcare professional to assess how you are by video call as they will be able to see physical signs, for example, you may look confused or in pain.
- Make sure your internet is switched on so that the video call can connect.
- If you are aware of areas in your home where the internet is not strong or dips, avoid having the video call in this area.
- Find a quiet space with good lighting – in front of a window with natural light on your face is perfect, but avoid direct sunlight. This will make it easier for your healthcare professional to see you clearly.
- Speak loudly and clearly but do not shout.
- Speak with your healthcare professional at the start of your video call about what will happen if you are cut off and what each of you will do if this should happen. This will ensure the session can restart as quickly and easily as possible.
- If the video call is not able to restart you will be sent another appointment.

Advantages of virtual consultations

There are many advantages to virtual consultations:

- There is no waiting room so you will not come into contact with germs and viruses from other people, for example COVID-19.
- It removes the stress of having to get to your appointment.
- There is no travelling time.
- There are no travel or parking costs.
- There may be appointment times that fit around your family and work life.



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