

When the COVID-19 pandemic began, many health care visits shifted to telehealth to keep patients and staff safe.<sup>1</sup> Telehealth visits include video and phone appointments. In focus groups about the use of telehealth, cancer survivors identified possible pros and cons, some of which are contradictory and reflect patients' differing viewpoints.

## Pros

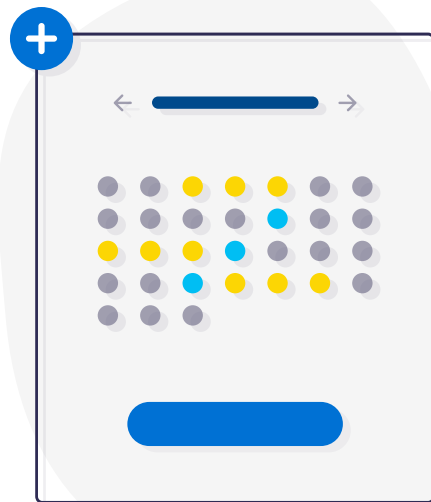
- Safety during the pandemic, especially for people with weakened immune systems
- Convenience and less time away from work and family
- Lower costs for travel and parking
- Easier for patients with mobility or cognitive limitations
- Ability to record visits and include family members or caregivers
- Patients may be more comfortable and less anxious at home
- Doctors seem to have more time, fewer distractions

## Cons

- Technology challenges and anxiety using technology
- Learning curves for both patients and doctors
- Privacy concerns
- Reduced feelings of connection
- Lack of emotional support due to increased isolation
- Limited access to the cancer care team
- Anxiety about the lack of a physical exam
- Doctors seem to have less time, more distractions

## Scheduling a Telehealth Visit

If your doctor recommends a telehealth visit, consider the following:



- Are you comfortable discussing the topics of the visit by telehealth?
- You have the right to ask for an in-person visit if you prefer to see your doctor in the office.
- Ask if your doctor expects you to measure any vital signs, such as temperature or blood pressure. If you do not have the right equipment or do not feel comfortable using it, consider an in-person visit.
- Confirm with your doctor's office that any test results will be available to discuss during the visit.
- If you do not have a computer and reliable internet access for a video visit, ask your doctor's office for a phone-only visit.
- How will you receive the link to sign on to the telehealth visit? Is there a back-up phone number, in case the video connection fails?
- For a phone visit, ask the number from which they will be calling, so you will know to answer the call.

## Completing a Technology Check

To be sure that your telehealth visit can be completed, you should:

- Ask your doctor's office to send you a test link.
- Visit the test link in advance, in case you need to download an app.
- Ask if your doctor's office can provide technical assistance.
- Ask your doctor's office about recording the visit to help you remember details from the discussion, and share with family members, if appropriate.



## Preparing for the Telehealth Visit

To maximize your time online with your care team:

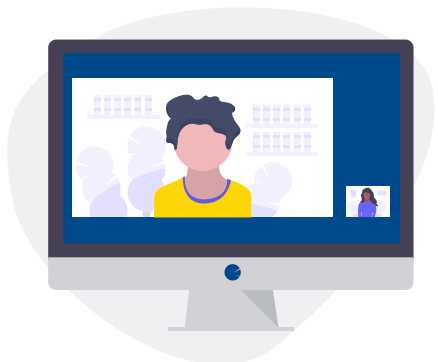
- Complete any technology check or other instructions from your doctor to support the telehealth visit.
- Find a private space to complete the visit.
- If you will include a caregiver or family member, make sure they are available.
- Prepare a list of the issues and questions to discuss.
- Have paper and a pen or pencil ready, so you can take notes.
- Is there a back-up plan if there is a technology issue? For example, will the team call you by phone if the video connection fails?

## Ending the Telehealth Visit and Identifying Next Steps

When the telehealth visit disconnects, you will not easily be able to reconnect to ask additional questions.

Before disconnecting:

- Ask for specific next steps. Will you follow up with tests, an in-office visit, changes in treatment, or another telehealth visit?
- Ask if you need to make an appointment for the next steps or if someone from the office will be in touch. Ask how long you should wait for the next steps in the care plan.



## Providing Feedback About the Telehealth Visit

Your cancer care team may ask for feedback about your telehealth visit. With the increase in the use of telehealth visits, doctors' offices are learning how to improve the quality of telehealth visits. Give specific feedback about what worked and what did not in your telehealth visit.

## About the National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship (NCCS)

Founded by and for cancer survivors in 1986, NCCS advocates for quality cancer care for everyone touched by cancer. For the NCCS Telehealth Project, NCCS asked cancer patients and doctors about their experience with telehealth in cancer care. NCCS recruited 29 patients and survivors to participate in 6 focus groups. NCCS then had 31 doctors respond to patient feedback and describe their personal telehealth experiences. This project was funded and supported by Pfizer Oncology.

For more information, go to [www.canceradvocacy.org/telehealth](http://www.canceradvocacy.org/telehealth).