

# Tapping into telehealth

October 22 2018, by Len Canter, Healthday Reporter

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(HealthDay)—With the national shortage of primary care doctors and—in certain areas—specialists, and with a quarter of the population living in rural areas without easy access to care, telehealth has stepped in

to help fill the gap.

In fact, millions of Americans now use it every year.

Telehealth involves virtual office visits. Note that you'll also see the term telemedicine, which usually refers to virtual visits with a doctor.

Telehealth is broader and includes care from other types of health professionals, such as nurses.

During "visits" you video chat with a health-care professional through your smartphone, tablet or computer, sometimes with no waiting time. And it all happens in real time.

Telehealth services vary from getting a diagnosis and a prescription, if needed, for minor medical issues, to ongoing monitoring of chronic conditions—especially helpful to older Americans. As an example, your heart rate or [blood sugar levels](#) can be sent remotely to your doctor's office and he or she can review them with you while you have your virtual visit.

One study found that the most common virtual visits were for acute respiratory problems, [urinary tract infections](#) and skin complaints. In fact, telehealth can be very helpful in dermatology, a specialty that's short on doctors.

Telehealth for [mental health care](#) is another growing area. Video sessions can help people stick with their treatment plan if getting to a therapist's office is difficult. And it can be just as effective as face-to-face appointments.

Some health insurance providers now offer telehealth as an option in some of their plans. There's usually a fee for a telehealth visit, but it can be lower than your in-office co-pay. If you're on a high-deductible plan,

the cost will certainly be less than you'd pay out-of-pocket for an office visit.

The Veterans Administration is just one of many government agencies that offers a variety of [telehealth](#) services.

**More information:** The National Conference of State Legislatures has state-by-state information on [telehealth](#) services in your area.

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