

Getting the most out of your virtual care appointment

Virtual Care is an appointment with anyone from your Mental Health, Drug and Alcohol care team that takes place by phone or video link.



There are lots of reasons why you might have an appointment virtually.

This could include:

- To talk to a specialist who doesn't work in your area (like a Psychiatrist)
- Getting people together to talk and arrange any support you may need
- To save you time or having to travel a long way for your appointment.
- To attend a Mental Health Review Tribunal when this cannot be in person
- When there are reasons you should avoid meeting in person (like during a pandemic)

You might attend your virtual appointment from your home or place that is part of your life (like work or a friend's house).

Or you might go into your local mental health, drug and alcohol service for your virtual appointment - usually when you are seeing a specialist such a Psychiatrist.

You may have a choice where you call in to your appointment from (e.g. your home or the mental health service). You can talk to your treating team about your options.

Advice from others with experience attending virtual appointments:



It's your healthcare!

You can ask for support and make choices about your appointments. You can:

- Ask for a support person (like a friend or family member) to be in the appointment with you.
- Ask who from the treating team will be in the appointment and make choices around who else you would like to be there.
- Ask for the Peer Support Worker to help you prepare for the appointment, attend with you, or contact you afterwards to talk about how it went
- Ask for the appointment to be by either phone or video link. Sometimes though, it might be important that you and the health professional can see each other so video link may be needed.

How you might feel about having an appointment virtually

People tell us there are some things they really like about having an appointment virtually, including:

- You don't need to travel to attend your appointment.
- You don't have to wait in the clinic or service for your appointment.
- You can be in your own space and make yourself comfortable.
- It can be easier to arrange for a support person to be with you in the appointment or around to chat afterwards when you are at home.
- It's easier to fit appointments in around other parts of your life, like caring for family, work or hobbies.
- You can see specialists that you might not normally be able to access because of where they are located (for example Psychiatrists who often work in major cities)

Some people feel nervous about having an appointment virtually instead of in person. We talk about some of these concerns below.

"How do I know it will be private?"

Health services have strict rules about the security and privacy of technology that they use for providing health care. Online appointment 'rooms' are locked so that only those people invited can come in.

No audio or video is recorded during the appointment. The health professional might write some notes though, like in a face-to-face appointment. If the meeting does need to be recorded (like for Guardianship meetings) you will be told about this before the meeting starts.

You can ask your treating team who has been invited to attend the appointment so you know who will be there.



It's normal to feel like this. Some people are very comfortable talking over video but for others it is very new.

Remember that the health professional you are talking to is a person too and also gets nervous. We are all learning about using this new technology together and it can feel a bit strange!

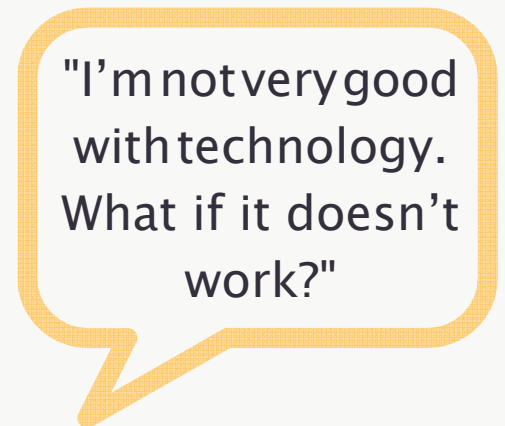
If talking by video link is very upsetting for you, chat to your treating team about other options. You might be able to talk by phone instead if that feels more comfortable.

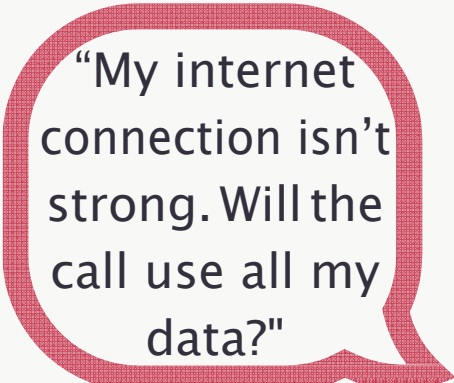
It can help to download the mobile or computer application that you need for the appointment ahead of time so that you can practice connecting. Many online systems will let you test your sound and video so you can make sure it is working. Just remember to provide your contact details, including email if you have it, to the staff involved in your virtual care.

If you are talking by phone, write down the numbers you need and have them in front of you. Most virtual care calls will have their own code and you can use these to practice dialling in before your appointment.

If you do have trouble connecting, don't worry, just ring the number provided and they will help you. It could be the person you are meeting having trouble with their connection!

Your health team understands that sometimes there are problems with technology. They will work with you to fix the problem or rearrange time for your appointment if needed.





"My internet connection isn't strong. Will the call use all my data?"

Connecting to your appointment with video will use either an internet connection or your mobile data. It is a bit like watching a video on YouTube or a streaming service. If you can do these things, your internet connection should be strong enough for the virtual appointment. It is recommended you connect through Google Chrome

If you are worried about using your mobile data, you could use an internet connection (like Wi-Fi) instead.

If your internet connection is very poor, or you do not have internet, think about where else you might be able to call from – a private space in a library or community centre or a friend's house, for example.


If your internet connection is poor and this is interrupting the call, you could turn off your video and use audio (voice) only. This can help boost the connection. Switching off your video will not disconnect the call.

You can also ask to talk by phone instead of video link if you do not have access to internet. Talk to your treating team about this.

If you have a support person, you could ask if they can be around to help you connect, be in the appointment with you, or talk about things afterwards.

Each service has a Peer Support Worker (a person with a personal experience of mental health issues) who can also offer support. They can check you have the technology you need, talk about what you want to say and call you after to see how it went.

Let your treating team know if you would like some help with your appointment.



"I would like some support with my appointment"

Getting ready for your appointment

There are some things you can do to prepare for your appointment and help you get the most out of using this service virtually.

Using the technology

- Ask what equipment you need for the appointment – is it by phone or video connection?
- Ask a staff member if they can give you some written instructions on how to use the technology and practice logging in to a call
- Write down a number for the person from the health service that you can call if you have trouble with your connection or equipment
- If you have them, think about using a headset or headphones instead of your computer / phone speakers as it these can make it easier to hear and be heard

Preparing to take part

- Ask what the focus of the appointment will be so you can write a list of the important things you want to ask or talk about. For example, it may be a general check-in to see how you are doing, a discussion about your medication or a review of your treatment plan.
- Ask how much time has been booked for the appointment so you can set aside this time in your diary
- Have some paper and a pen nearby so you can make a note of what you talk about in the appointment
- Some people find it helpful to have visual prompts or reminders nearby to help you re-centre during the appointment if needed. This could include images which make you feel calm, positive statements or words or items which bring you comfort.

Getting your space ready

It is a good idea to think about the space you are calling from and how private or comfortable this is for you.

- A quiet space free of distractions is important. Turn off the TV, radio or other appliances that are noisy so that you can be heard easily.
- Think about who else will be around that might overhear your conversation? You may feel comfortable with this, or you may choose to find another location, or ask the other person if they can give you space for a while.
- If the appointment is by video, what is in the background (behind you or around you) where you are? Think about moving anything you don't feel comfortable with others seeing.
- Consider what you are wearing and the space you are in when getting ready to connect by video call. Remember that these will be able to be seen by others in the appointment. You don't need to wear anything special or dress up for the appointment but you might like to think about how appropriate your clothing is and how comfortable you feel.

After your appointment

- Plan for what you can do after the appointment to take care of yourself if you feel upset or unsettled by the conversation
- Have contact details nearby for someone you can call if you want to talk about how the appointment went or if you feel upset. This could be a personal support person or someone in your treating team.
- Relax and look after yourself. You have earned it!