



Virtual visits can address many health concerns

Back when Kaiser Permanente physician Peter Barkett's great-grandfather was practicing medicine, house calls were commonplace for doctors. Now a version of house calls is making a comeback with virtual visits.

Along with in-person visits, Kaiser Permanente offers several virtual care options* for primary and specialty care including phone appointments and video visits. Care Chat and e-visits are other options. Is a virtual visit a good choice for your health concern? Dr. Barkett offers some guidance to help you decide.



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Phone, video, or in-person visit?

"If you just need to discuss your blood pressure or blood sugar readings, how well a medication is working for you, or recent lab results, a phone appointment is ideal," says Dr. Barkett. "If you need your doctor to listen to your lungs, look in your throat, or do some other type of physical exam, an in-person visit is needed." Video visits can handle most issues that fall somewhere in between. And if an in-person visit isn't needed but you haven't seen your doctor in the last year, a video visit is a good option.

Even dermatology issues can be diagnosed virtually, which often surprises patients. "If the patient can take a high-quality photo of their skin condition and send it to their doctor, the doctor can look at it and discuss it with a dermatologist, if necessary, to determine if an in-person visit is needed," says Dr. Barkett.

Choosing between Care Chat and an e-visit

Care Chat provides real-time online medical care from a Kaiser Permanente practitioner, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. As with a video visit, you can upload a photo to help with diagnosis, and your caregiver can text you links to additional information if needed.

An e-visit is best for common medical issues such as allergies and lower back pain. Just answer a

series of questions via an online form and get a diagnosis, treatment plan, or other guidance on what care is right for you. Complete and submit the questionnaire anytime. Responses are sent between 9 a.m. and 9 p.m. daily.

Preparing for a phone or video visit

Before your phone or video visit, be sure you're registered at kp.org/wa. Downloading the Kaiser Permanente Washington mobile app onto your phone is another option.

Follow these steps to prepare for your virtual visit:

- When you're planning your first video visit, you can test the technology before your appointment using your computer or smartphone. If you call to make your appointment, you'll be offered help with testing from our video visit support team, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. You can also call them at **1-877-751-2153**. If you schedule your appointment online, you can perform a self-test anytime from the scheduling page.
- Complete the virtual check-in process, which you'll be prompted to do online before the appointment. This usually includes updating your lists of medications, allergies, and

health issues, as well as filling out screening questionnaires.

- If you can, weigh yourself, take your temperature, and get a few blood pressure readings before the appointment so you'll be ready to discuss your vital signs.
- Make sure your phone, laptop, or tablet is fully charged.
- Write down your most important questions and have a pen and paper nearby to record the answers.
- Choose a quiet place to talk where you won't be interrupted or distracted. "I did a phone visit recently where my patient was driving, pulled over to the side of the road to talk, and had a highway patrolman pull up behind him with flashing lights," says Dr. Barkett. "That wasn't ideal." ■



Members give a thumbs-up to virtual visits

Kaiser Permanente members Diane and Dick Yates say virtual visits have been a real gift for them over the past year.

"My husband has a lot of health issues, and being able to get as much of his health care as possible over the phone or via video visits, without trips to the medical center, is great," says Diane.



Diane Yates

"Dick weighs himself every morning, and we check his blood pressure, pulse, and oxygen level, so we can discuss his vitals when we talk to his doctors. When he had some issues with skin cancer, we took photos of the spots and sent them to the doctor in advance of an office visit."

The couple does go into a medical center to get preventive care, including their flu shots. But when it makes sense, virtual care is their first choice. "We usually schedule phone visits in the morning when we haven't combed our hair yet," jokes Diane, "and video visits the rest of the time." ■

*Virtual care is offered when appropriate and available.