

## Suggestions from the American College of Rheumatology for Patients During the COVID-19 Pandemic: How to Navigate Telehealth

### **Introduction for Providers**

The American College of Rheumatology (ACR) has put together the following guidance for patients with questions about accessing care remotely. Clinical guidance from the ACR for the treatment of rheumatology patients during the COVID-19 pandemic are available [here](#). Providers are encouraged to adapt this information to fit their practice's unique circumstances.

### **Information for Patients**

#### **What is the best way to connect with my provider during the COVID-19 pandemic?**

Many clinics are calling scheduled patients in advance, sometimes screening for symptoms of infection, and offering telehealth visits as an alternative to in-person visits. Clinic staff will provide information about preferred telehealth platform(s) at that time (see below). While remote visits are imperfect, and sometimes a face-to-face evaluation may be necessary, in many cases your provider may be able to address your immediate concerns and delay a face-to-face visit until the COVID-19 risk has sufficiently decreased. Local conditions and/or regulations will influence your provider's approach, so please call ahead before walking into the clinic.

Patients are encouraged to call their providers with questions, especially medical problems, between visits. Alternatively, many patients can send electronic messages through a patient portal. These portals are often preferred for non-urgent requests as their use can help prevent overloading the phone systems. Depending on how complex your questions or problems are, your provider may ask you to schedule a formal visit (through telehealth or in-person) to discuss.

#### **How do I video chat with my provider?**

Your provider may use any one of several different applications that are available for remote visits. During the COVID-19 crisis, the government has relaxed restrictions and expanded the number of available platforms, but your provider may only be able to work with specific platforms. You may have experience with video chats, but getting a secure video visit to work in the office can be a challenge, so please be patient as your providers and their staff work out the kinks. Most platforms require a stable, high-speed internet connection (WiFi is preferred over cellular connections), so please plan ahead

regarding where to go to get the best connection (we understand that you may well be confined to your home depending on local regulations). If possible, consider testing your connection in advance of your appointment by video chatting with a friend or family member. Ideally the visit will be in a quiet room if your circumstances allow.

Some platforms allow for conversations between three or more individuals, making it possible for clinic staff or multiple providers to participate at the same time. Rest assured that the same level of privacy as a one-on-one conversation is afforded during multi-person visits.

### **Can I talk to my provider on the phone?**

Some providers may offer phone-only evaluations, especially if your internet connection doesn't allow for a video chat. Some insurers do not reimburse for phone visits, but this is changing as payors respond to the COVID-19 crisis. The lack of video further reduces your provider's ability to perform an exam, which remains a cornerstone of medical care, so this is typically the least preferred method of communication, but it may be better than nothing in some circumstances.

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