

Tips to Help Access Remote Care Amid COVID-19

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With the COVID-19 emergency prompting people to stay home more than usual, accessing in-person health care services has become more challenging than a few months ago.

That has spurred a surge in telehealth appointments, with new state and federal regulations making it easier and more affordable for people to use digital devices to access medical advice related to COVID-19 and a myriad of other health issues.

While this is a positive development, there are other potentially overlooked ways to access medical care remotely and use technology to cultivate healthier habits at home. These resources may help encourage whole-person health while reducing the risk of possible exposure to COVID-19 associated with in-person care appointments.

Here are several strategies to consider:

Physical Health: Nearly three-quarters (73%)¹ of employers offer health and wellness programs, including some with virtual resources that help prevent or better manage certain chronic conditions (such as diabetes or obesity) that may be risk factors for complications related to COVID-19.² People can check with their employer or health plan for [virtual programs](#) that provide personalized, interactive online weight loss support aimed at motivating individuals to improve their nutrition and get active. With many gyms and other exercise facilities currently closed, at-home support programs are increasingly valuable. Plus, people may consider telephonic programs to connect with a licensed counselor to help address various issues, including family and marriage difficulties, alcohol or substance misuse, and depression or stress.

Eye Health: People should also take note of their eye health while spending more time at home, in part because of the link between screen use and digital eye strain.³ Research shows the prolonged use of computers and smartphones may cause symptoms such as headache or sore neck, shoulder or back.⁴ To help prevent these symptoms, people should consider keeping computer screens at least 30 inches away from their eyes, resting their eyes every 20 minutes, and blinking frequently to avoid dry eyes.⁵ People may consider prescription glasses that help filter “blue light,” which is emitted by digital devices and may contribute to eye strain.⁶ Also, for the 150 million Americans who use corrective eyewear,⁷ [online retailers](#) enable people to order glasses from the comfort of their homes, in some cases offering “virtual mirrors” or apps that allow users to [extract their prescription](#) from their current glasses.

Dental Health: With many dentist offices postponing routine cleanings during the COVID-19 emergency, people should consider focusing on recommended at-home hygiene habits. This includes brushing twice a day for two minutes with a fluoridated toothpaste, daily flossing, the use of an [alcohol-free mouthwash](#), a tongue scraper, and water flosser. The recent emergence of “teledentistry” may also help people access dental advice and guidance to care, in part to avoid often unnecessary emergency room visits⁸ for oral health concerns. And, because many social events are also being postponed, now may be the time for people to [improve their smiles](#). Teledentistry may enable people to straighten their teeth without the need for an in-person dental appointment, using direct-to-consumer clear aligners that offer improved convenience and savings for orthodontic care.

Hearing Health: There are also online resources that may be helpful for the estimated 48 million Americans with some degree of hearing loss,⁹ a condition that may be linked to [depression, dementia](#) and [increased risk of falls](#). People initially can use free [online screeners](#) if they suspect signs of hearing loss but are not ready for an in-person hearing test. For people who have previously had a hearing test – but have not yet moved forward with treatment – [home-delivery options](#) may make it more convenient and affordable to order hearing aids without an in-person appointment with a health care professional.

With a greater focus for many people on practicing healthier habits to help maintain or improve well-being during these challenging times, considering these tips and remote care strategies may prove beneficial amid the COVID-19 emergency, and in the future.

1 U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 2016, https://www.uschamber.com/sites/default/files/022436_labr_wellness_report_opt.pdf

2 Centers for Disease control and Prevention, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-at-higher-risk.html>

3 The Vision Council, 2020, <https://www.thevisioncouncil.org/content/digital-eye-strain>

4 American Academy of Ophthalmology, 2019, <https://www.aaopt.org/newsroom/news-releases/detail/protect-your-eyes-from-too-much-screen-time>

5 American Academy of Ophthalmology, 2020, <https://www.aoa.org/patients-and-public/caring-for-your-vision/protecting-your-vision/computer-vision-syndrome>

6 Prevent Blindness, 2020, <https://www.preventblindness.org/blue-light-and-your-eyes>

7 American Academy of Ophthalmology, <https://www.aaopt.org/newsroom/eye-health-statistics>

8 International Journal for Quality in Health Care, 2017, <https://academic.oup.com/intqhc/article/29/5/642/4085442>

9 Hearing Loss Association of America, 2018, https://www.hearingloss.org/wp-content/uploads/HLAA_HearingLoss_Facts_Statistics.pdf?pdf=FactStats

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³ Available to those who qualify; available term length varies by state. <https://www.uhone.com/insurance/short-term>