



DementiaUK
Helping families face dementia

Getting the most out of a remote consultation



Increasingly, appointments with GPs, memory assessment services and other health and social care professionals are taking place remotely, by phone or video call, rather than in person. This became common practice during the Covid-19 pandemic, and many services have continued this way of working.

Often, there is a hybrid approach, where some appointments take place remotely and others in person.

There will still be times when people need a face-to-face appointment, for example if a physical examination, assessment or procedure is necessary; or if they are unable to communicate via phone or video (even if they are supported by family or friends).

If the person with dementia would prefer a face-to-face appointment, this should be possible to arrange by speaking to the receptionist or practice manager.

You may be sent some documents to fill in before a remote appointment, such as a memory assessment questionnaire. You may be asked

to return these to the healthcare professional beforehand, or to share them in the consultation – for example by reading them aloud or sharing screenshots.

Pros and cons of remote consultations

Pros

- People who have difficulty travelling to appointments – for example, those who don't drive or find it hard to use public transport – can access them from home
- It can reduce stress for people with dementia who feel unsettled in unfamiliar places
- People may feel more comfortable in their own home, giving their health or social care professional a clearer idea of their usual personality and behaviour
- In some cases, the increasing use of remote consultations has reduced waiting lists for appointments

Cons

- People who are unfamiliar with technology may find the process difficult or stressful

- There may be technical difficulties like an unreliable internet connection
- The health or social care professional may not be able to use the person's body language to reliably gauge what they may be feeling or trying to say
- Some physical changes – such as changes in a person's mobility or gait – are hard to see and assess in a remote consultation
- It can be harder to develop a rapport between the person with dementia and the professional
- If the person is hard of hearing, remote consultations – particularly by phone – can be challenging
- Some memory assessment tools are unsuitable for remote use

Telephone consultations

If a person with dementia is offered an appointment by telephone, they should get a text, email or letter in advance with a date and time for the appointment. If you have lasting power of attorney for health and welfare (see Sources of support on p7) or are registered with the GP as a 'trusted person', it may be

possible for this information to be sent to you as well.

The doctor, health or social care professional will phone the person on the number they have provided at the specified appointment time (although as with in-person appointments, they may run late).

There are some practical things you can do to get the best out of a telephone appointment:

- Put the phone on speaker so that you can join the appointment with the person with dementia and take notes easily
- Have pen and paper nearby so you can note any important information
- If you need to interrupt during a phone call, simply say, "Excuse me," or try tapping on the phone mouthpiece to get the professional to pause
- If you are finding it hard to hear or understand the professional, ask them to speak louder, slower or more clearly
- Do not be afraid to ask the professional to repeat information

Video consultations

Video consultations involve speaking to a doctor or other professional using the video camera on your smartphone, tablet or computer.

Health and social care professionals use a variety of apps for video consultations. These include:

- Zoom
- Skype
- Microsoft Teams
- Attend Anywhere (the NHS's own video calling app)

You can also use the messenger app WhatsApp to make video calls, and FaceTime if you have an Apple device, but these are less commonly used for appointments.

Before the appointment, you should be told which app to use and given instructions on how to use it.

- To use Skype, you will need to download the software first and create an account
- To use Zoom, Teams or Attend Anywhere, you do not need to download the app – you will be sent a link to click and enter the meeting online

For a video consultation you will need:

- a smartphone, tablet or computer that allows video calling – make sure your microphone and camera are switched on and the volume is at the correct level for you
- a reliable internet connection
- a well-lit, comfortable, quiet and private space so that you can see and hear each other clearly
- the correct app or meeting link

To get the best out of your video consultation:

- Look out for an email or text with the link to your video appointment. If you have not received this by the day before your appointment, contact the service
- Check your equipment in advance: make sure the camera and the microphone work
- If you are not using your phone, keep it close by – if there are problems with the video call, the professional may phone you
- If possible, sit in a well-lit room, away from a window (sitting with a window behind you will cause



you to appear in silhouette, so the health or social care professional cannot see your face)

- If the person with dementia has not used video calling before, you could trial a call beforehand to familiarise them and see how they respond to being on camera and speaking to someone on screen. You could video call them yourself, or get a friend or family member to do so
- As part of a memory assessment, the person may be asked to do some drawings. You can show these to the professional by holding them up to your device's camera
- If you find it difficult to interrupt during a video call, you could consider raising your hand, or

using an 'I want to speak' card (please see Sources of support on p7)

Your video consultation will be private and will not be recorded without your consent. You may also be able to invite other people (such as a family member) to join the consultation on their own smartphone, tablet or computer, or in the room with you.

Tips for all remote consultations

There are a few things you can do to make all remote consultations run more smoothly.

- Ensure you have filled in any forms or other documents you may have been sent

- Write down anything that you need to discuss in advance, including changes in behaviour or symptoms; concerns or queries about medication; questions about tests that are due or you would like to request
- Make sure your device is fully charged and that you have a strong WiFi or data connection
- If possible, ask the person with dementia what they want to discuss at their appointment, what they hope to get from it, and how much they want you to speak for them
- Inform the professional of any communication tips that would help the person with dementia, eg explaining simply why the appointment is happening; speaking in short, straightforward sentences; avoiding open-ended questions
- If you need an interpreter or British Sign Language support, request this in advance
- If the person with dementia wears glasses or a hearing aid, make sure they have them for the appointment
- Inform the health or social care professional if you hold lasting power of attorney for health and welfare or have consent to speak on the persons' behalf
- Take notes on what the health or social care professional says
- Ask the professional to repeat or explain anything you don't hear properly or are unsure about
- Make sure you are told what will happen next, eg when the person's next appointment will be and with whom; whether any tests are needed; where to pick up any prescriptions, etc

Phone calls and video calls can be more challenging than speaking to someone face to face. You and the person with dementia may feel tired after the consultation, so don't be afraid to have some 'time out' afterwards.

Finally, do offer feedback (if you want) to the health or social care team about anything that was helpful or challenging about your remote consultation. Feedback helps professionals improve or continue good practice.

Sources of support

If you would like to speak to a specialist dementia nurse about remote consultations or any other aspect of dementia, please call our Helpline on **0800 888 6678** (Monday to Friday 9am-9pm, Saturday and Sunday 9am-5pm) or email helpline@dementiauk.org

To book a phone or video call appointment with an Admiral Nurse, please visit dementiauk.org/book-a-clinic-appointment

Dementia UK resources

How to get a diagnosis of dementia

dementiauk.org/getting-a-diagnosis-of-dementia

Getting the best out of GP and other health appointments

dementiauk.org/gp-appointment

GP online services for people with dementia

dementiauk.org/gp-online-services

Tips for communicating with a person with dementia

dementiauk.org/tips-for-better-communication

Lasting power of attorney

dementiauk.org/lasting-power-of-attorney

Other resources

NHS information on video consultations

nhs.uk/nhs-services/gps/video-consultations

Remote memory assessment appointments – a guide

youtube.com/watch?v=AvUdDoJQVQY

How to use Attend Anywhere

youtube.com/watch?v=o-64JK4nLuE&t=1s

Zoom

zoom.us

Skype

skype.com

‘I want to speak’ cards

dementiavoices.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/I-want-to-speak-card-english.pdf

The information in this leaflet is written and reviewed by dementia specialist Admiral Nurses. We hope you find it useful. If you have feedback, please email feedback@dementiauk.org

Publication date: November 2022

Review date: November 2024

© Dementia UK 2022

We want to ensure no one has to face dementia alone – and we can only do this because of our generous supporters. If you would like to help, please consider making a kind gift.



To donate: call **0300 365 5500**,
visit dementiauk.org/donate-to-support
or scan the QR code.

Thank you.



If you have questions or concerns about any aspect of dementia, please contact our Admiral Nurses.

Helpline: **0800 888 6678** or helpline@dementiauk.org

Virtual clinics: dementiauk.org/book-a-clinic-appointment



dementiauk.org • info@dementiauk.org

Dementia UK, 7th Floor, One Aldgate, London EC3N 1RE
Dementia UK is a registered charity in England and Wales (1039404) and Scotland (SC 047429).