

Getting the best out of a remote appointment



Increasingly, medical appointments – particularly with GPs, but also with memory assessment services and other health and social care professionals – are taking place remotely, by phone or video call, rather than in person. Often, there is a combined 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 do not drive, find it hard to use public transport or live a long way from the service – 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
- In the case of video appointments, it may be possible for family members to join even if they cannot physically be with the person with dementia

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 assess the person's body language to reliably gauge what they may be feeling or trying to communicate
- 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 receive 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 p10) 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 face-to-face appointments, they may run late).

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

- If the person with dementia has more than one phone number on their records (eg landline and mobile), ensure the professional knows which to call
- Make sure the phone is charged
- Put the phone on speaker so that you can join the appointment with the person with dementia, if they wish, and take notes easily
- Have pen and paper nearby to note any important information
- If you or the person with dementia 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 or the person with dementia 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 a smartphone, tablet or computer. Health and social care professionals use a variety of apps and websites for video consultations. These include:

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

The messenger app WhatsApp and FaceTime on Apple devices can also be used to make video calls, but these are less commonly used for appointments.

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

- To use Skype, you will need to download the app first and create an account
- To use Zoom, Teams or Attend Anywhere, there is no need to download the app – the person 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 the microphone and camera are switched on and the volume is at a suitable level
- a reliable internet connection
- a well-lit, comfortable, quiet and private space so that everyone involved in the appointment can see and hear each other clearly
- the correct app and/or meeting link

To get the best out of a video consultation:

- Look out for an email or text with the link to the video appointment. If this has not arrived by the day before the appointment, contact the practice/clinic
- If other people (such as family members) wish to join the consultation on their own smartphone, tablet or computer, ask the service provider in advance if this is possible and how to do it
- Check the equipment in advance: make sure the camera and the microphone work
- If the person is not using their phone for the appointment, keep it close by – if there are problems with the video call, the professional may phone instead
- If possible, sit in a well-lit room, away from a window (sitting in front of a window will cause the person to appear in silhouette, so the health or social care professional cannot see their face)
- If the person with dementia has not used video calling before, trial a call beforehand to familiarise them with using the app 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. They may be asked to show these to the professional by holding them up to the device's camera
- If you or the person with dementia find it difficult to interject during a video call if you have something to say, you could raise your hand – either physically or using the 'Raise hand' function in the app, or using an 'I want to speak' card (please see Sources of support on p11)
- You may wish to record the appointment within the video calling app (but inform the professional if so) or ask the professional to record it, or have pen and paper handy to take notes

Video consultations are private and will not be recorded without the permission of the person with dementia. If they lack the mental capacity to decide whether to consent to recording and it is considered to be in their best interests, the appointment may be recorded without their consent – please see Sources of support on p11 for information on mental capacity and decision-making.

Tips for all remote consultations

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

- Ensure the person with dementia has filled in any forms or other documents they have been sent, with support if necessary
- Write down points 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 the device is fully charged and that there is a strong WiFi or data connection
- If possible, ask the person with dementia what they want to discuss during 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 person's behalf
- Take notes on what the health or social care professional says
- Ask the professional to repeat or explain anything you do not 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 do not 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 the remote consultation. Feedback helps professionals improve or continue good practice.

Sources of support

If you are caring for someone with dementia or living with the condition yourself, you can register for our free online sessions, ‘Dementia: what next?’ Hosted by dementia specialist Admiral Nurses, they cover topics like types of dementia, symptoms, financial and legal issues and planning for the future. Sign up at

➤ dementiauk.org/dementia-what-next

To speak to an Admiral Nurse on our free Helpline, call **0800 888 6678** (Monday-Friday 9am-9pm, Saturday and Sunday 9am-5pm, every day except 25th December) or email ➤ helpline@dementiauk.org

If you prefer, you can book a phone or video call with an Admiral Nurse at a time to suit you: please visit ➤ dementiauk.org/book

Dementia UK resources

Getting a diagnosis of dementia

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

Getting the best out of GP and other health appointments

➤ dementiauk.org/getting-the-best-out-of-gp-and-other-health-appointments

Online GP services for people with dementia

➤ dementiauk.org/gp-online-services

Lasting power of attorney

➤ dementiauk.org/lasting-power-of-attorney

Medication and dementia

➤ dementiauk.org/medication

Mental capacity and decision-making

➤ dementiauk.org/mental-capacity

Registering as a carer with your GP

➤ dementiauk.org/the-importance-of-registering-as-a-carer-with-your-gp

Tests for dementia

➤ dementiauk.org/tests-for-dementia

Tips for communicating with a person with dementia

➤ dementiauk.org/tips-for-communication

Other resources

How to use Attend Anywhere

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

‘I want to speak’ cards

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

NHS information on video consultations

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

Remote memory assessment appointments – a guide

➤ youtube.com/watch?v=AvUdDoJQVQY

Skype

➤ skype.com

Zoom

➤ zoom.us

**To speak to a dementia specialist Admiral Nurse
about any aspect of dementia:**

Contact our Helpline:
0800 888 6678 or helpline@dementiauk.org

Book a virtual appointment:
dementiauk.org/book

**Our charity relies entirely on donations to fund our
life-changing work. If you would like to donate to help us
support more families:**

- Call **0300 365 5500**
- Visit **dementiauk.org/donate**
- Scan the QR code

Thank you.



dementiauk.org • info@dementiauk.org

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Dementia UK, 7th Floor, One Aldgate, London EC3N 1RE
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