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# Telemedicine & Chronic Pain Management

This handout is intended to help primary care clinics think through how to use telemedicine to care for their patients with chronic pain on long-term opioid therapy while maintaining evidence-informed care.

## Virtual Visits

### Chronic pain can often be addressed without an in-person visit

When possible, live two-way video (telehealth) visits are recommended, with the recognition that many patients may lack the technology to support this type of interaction. Telephone visits provide an alternate approach to telehealth visits.

There are several potential advantages to virtual visits, including: 1) insight into a patient's home setting, 2) the possibility that some patients will be more comfortable receiving care outside of a medical setting, or 3) fewer barriers for patients in accessing healthcare appointments (e.g., lack of transportation, long car rides).

### Patient assessments

Most recommended [assessments for patients with chronic pain](#) (e.g., PEG scores for pain and function, PHQ-9 for depression) can be completed during a virtual visit or prior to the visit if the EHR has a patient portal for the patient to access.

Urine drug tests (UDTs) can be conducted remotely if necessary because of patient safety concerns. For more information on how to conduct remote UDTs, please see the [Remote Urine Drug Testing Workflow and FAQ](#).

### Billing for virtual visits

Many insurers have expanded their coverage of telehealth visits. Some insurers cover telephone visits as well. Nevertheless, it is best for the patient to contact their insurer to make sure these types of visits will be covered. It is recommended to document that the patient consented to a telehealth or telephone visit and why you are conducting a telehealth or telephone visit in your notes.

## Non-Opioid Treatments

Non-opioid treatments such as physical therapy and behavioral therapy play a crucial role in managing chronic pain. There is strong [evidence](#) that behavioral health services are effective when delivered through telehealth. In addition, many resources are available online for managing pain, including yoga, books supporting individuals seeking information on how to best manage their chronic pain, and meditation. Some apps recommended in the [Chronic Pain Self-Management Resources document](#) include:

- **PTSD Coach:** PTSD Coach assists individuals with chronic pain who experienced trauma to learn about, track, and manage symptoms. <https://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/materials/apps/ptsdcoach.asp>



- **Breathe2Relax:** This stress management app trains on the “belly breathing” technique. It provides breathing exercises to learn and practice the breathing technique. <http://t2health.dcoe.mil/apps/breathe2relax>
- **Headspace:** Meditation app. The Basics course of this app is free and teaches the fundamental techniques of meditation and mindfulness. <https://www.headspace.com/headspace-meditation-app>
- **Stop Breathe Think:** This app supports individuals with checking in with their emotions, and then recommends short, guided meditations, yoga, and acupuncture videos. <https://www.stopbreathethink.com/>
- **The Three Minute Breathing Space:** This 3-minute practice is great to use in the middle of the day, with stressful situations as they arise. Available as a handout, app, and recording. <http://franticworld.com/the-three-minute-breathing-space-meditation-is-now-free-to-download/>

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