



Five Questions You Can Ask Your Doctor about Digital Health

Broadband-enabled technology is continually changing the way doctors interact with their patients. What does this mean for you?

Well, what used to be a long trip for a medical visit (especially for those in rural or remote areas) can now be a videoconference. Or, you might have to confirm your appointment through your doctor's patient portal, which may also be able to give you quick access to your lab tests and certain other records. Because these changes are occurring so fast, you might have questions about how digital health tools can work for you. If you do, we suggest getting started by asking your doctor these simple questions:

1

I've heard that digital tools can help me get healthier or stay well. What can you tell me about digital health?

Digital health is an umbrella term. It is the use of telecommunications technologies to collect, share and manipulate health information to improve health and healthcare. These health tools include a wide variety of technologies and applications like email, smartphones, tablet computers, as well as videoconferencing, cardiac monitors, and other remote sensors. Some digital health tools are used primarily by doctors or healthcare professionals — like Electronic Medical Records.

Other digital health tools help patients and doctors collaborate. For example, a patient with a digital glucometer could monitor her blood sugar levels at home and then hit "send" to transmit that information to her healthcare provider at their office or hospital. And, then there are thousands of digital health tools designed primarily for consumers to provide health information, track and improve everything from diet and exercise and to ensure better management of chronic diseases.

2

Are there any digital health tools that would be particularly useful given my diagnosis?

By some estimates, there are over 100,000 digital health apps in the three major app stores. For individuals with smartphones, these apps are simple to download and often free. In addition, there are many other digital health tools and devices being developed every day. Some early studies suggest that these technologies contribute to tangible improvements in consumer health. Also, many users themselves report positive benefits. The most effective tools often use *your* specific health information and are customized to help you track your progress. To fully understand what might work best for you, there are many things to consider. That is why it is important to ask your doctor if he/she can recommend any approved technology that may be particularly well suited for your needs and health condition.



3

Does your practice have a patient portal?

Patient portals are websites designed to help better connect patients to their providers and the healthcare system. While portals may differ, most offer patients the ability to schedule upcoming appointments, view the results of recent tests or examinations and obtain other types of health information. Some portals allow patients to securely and electronically communicate with their providers. Patient portals are becoming an increasingly important way to stay engaged with your providers and healthcare system.

4

Does your patient portal include e-visits?

E-visits are video, email or text-based communications between patients and their providers. They are a convenient way for patients to get access to their primary care physicians for non-urgent health care or follow-up treatment, for example. E-visits also eliminate the inconvenience of patient travel and lengthy wait times. And, for those in rural and remote areas, e-visits could be a lifesaver. For a long time, only a few doctors offered e-visits. However, this is rapidly changing. Talk to your doctor or specialist about what's available in your area.

5

What are the best sources of health information for patients on the Web?

There are valid concerns about whether the health information found in Web searches is factual and correct. Guidelines for finding reliable information include:

- Determine who is responsible for the website. Reputable health websites will post information about the authors of the website.
- Understand the purpose of the website. Be cautious about sites trying to sell a product or service.
- Establish how old the information is on the website. Health information should be current and up to date. Older information *may* be inaccurate or unreliable.
- Federal government websites (usually ending with ". gov") are reliable sources of information.

Want to Know More? The Connect2Health^{fcc} Task Force is working to raise consumer awareness about the value of broadband in the health and care sectors. Learn about the FCC's Connect2Health Task Force and its work on consumer health issues at www.fcc.gov/health. For information about other communications issues, visit the FCC's Consumer website at www.fcc.gov/consumers.

For this or any other consumer publication in an accessible format (electronic ASCII text, Braille, large print or audio), please write or call us at the address or phone number below, or send an email to FCC504@fcc.gov. This document is for consumer education purposes only and is not intended to affect any proceedings or cases involving this subject matter or related issues.

Last Reviewed 9/17/14

