



Seeing a psychiatrist online

Some psychiatrists do consultations over the internet, using video conference software (similar to Skype).

Instead of meeting in person, you and the psychiatrist talk to each other using a computer, tablet or smartphone. You and the psychiatrist will see each other on the screen and hear each other talking in real time.

This is sometimes called 'telehealth' or 'telepsychiatry'.

Studies show that online consultations can work just as well as face-to-face consultations.

Online consultations can be very convenient, because they cut down your travel time. They can be particularly useful if you live in a rural or remote area, or find it difficult to travel.

How does an online consultation work?

You might do the consultation in a local hospital, a GP's clinic, a health service, or at home. The psychiatrist will be at their workplace.

Each psychiatrist (or health service) has their own preference for which software or app they use. They will give you instructions beforehand.

During your appointment, the psychiatrist will speak with you and ask you questions in the same way they would at a face-to-face consultation.

Who can do online consultations?

Online consultations aren't suitable for everyone. Your psychiatrist will agree to do one only if it's a good fit for you and your health needs.

Sometimes a face-to-face consultation is needed, for example to do physical check-ups or to prescribe some medications.

In some cases, you might have a mix of face-to-face and online consultations with your psychiatrist.

What do I need?

If you do the online consultation at a hospital or clinic, they will provide everything for you.

If you do the online consultation at home, you will need to have:

- a quiet, private room
- a fast, reliable internet connection
- a computer, tablet or smartphone (your psychiatrist will tell you which devices will work with their software).

As a guide, you will need internet speeds of at least 0.8 Mbps (megabits per second) for downloads and 0.25 Mbps for uploads. Faster speeds will give you better quality video. You can test your internet speed [here](#).

If you use a computer, it must have a microphone and a webcam. Most newer computers will have these built in.

Your psychiatrist will give you instructions about how to download the video conference software. You won't need to buy any software.

How do I arrange an online consultation?

Usually, you will need a referral from a GP to see a psychiatrist either in person or online.

Speak to your GP or health service about seeing a psychiatrist online.

The RANZCP's Find a Psychiatrist directory lists Australian psychiatrists with a private practice who offer online consultations. The directory will be expanded to include New Zealand in the future.

To use the search, enter a location, then click on Advanced Search, then under Practice Details, select Offers telepsychiatry.

How much does it cost?

Australia

If you see a psychiatrist online through a public hospital or public health service, you generally won't have to pay.

If you see a psychiatrist privately, ask about fees before your first appointment. Some psychiatrists will bulk bill (so you don't need to pay anything), but for others you may pay an out-of-pocket fee (the part of the fee that Medicare doesn't cover).

You can usually only get a Medicare refund for the consultation if you:

- live outside a major city (see the Department of Health's remoteness area map for what counts as a major city), and
- are more than 15 km from the psychiatrist, and
- are not currently staying in hospital.

If you live in an aged care facility or are a client of an Aboriginal medical service, you can get a Medicare refund no matter where you live.

➤ More about the cost of seeing a psychiatrist in Australia

yourhealthinmind.org/cost

➤ Find a psychiatrist near you who offers online consultations

yourhealthinmind.org/find

New Zealand

If you see a psychiatrist online through a public hospital or community health service, you generally won't have to pay. If you see a psychiatrist privately, there will generally be a fee. Ask about fees before your first appointment.

Tips for successful consultations

- Read the instructions your psychiatrist provides.
- Make the room as quiet as possible – turn off radios and TVs.
- If you have young children, arrange care in advance so you don't get interrupted.
- Turn off your mobile phone.
- If possible, test the connection and software before your first consultation.
- Try to make sure your face is well-lit.
- Don't sit directly in front of a window, because it can make it hard to see your face.
- If you have someone supporting you, check that the webcam includes them in the shot.
- There might be some delay between one person speaking and the other person hearing it. Wait for the other person to finish speaking before you start.
- Avoid using the internet for other things at the same time (for example streaming TV, downloading movies or playing games).

Remember

- ✓ If it's difficult for you to travel to a psychiatrist, seeing one online might be a good option for you.
- ✓ Speak to your GP or health service about seeing a psychiatrist online.
- ✓ Find psychiatrists who offer online consultations in the Find a Psychiatrist directory (Australia only).

This fact sheet is also available online at yourhealthinmind.org

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About us

Psychiatrists are doctors who specialise in mental health.

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists:

- trains and supports psychiatrists
- advocates for better mental health for our communities
- sets standards in psychiatry.



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Psychiatrists



This is a general guide only, and does not replace individual medical advice. Please speak to your doctor for advice about your situation. The RANZCP is not liable for any consequences arising from relying on this information. Subject matter experts, people with lived experience of mental illness and carers all contributed to this fact sheet.

Common questions about seeing a psychiatrist online

Do I have to have an online consultation?

No. If you would prefer, you can ask for a face-to-face consultation instead. You may need to see a different psychiatrist. Also, seeing a psychiatrist online might be the best way to get expert advice quickly.

Can I have someone with me?

A family member, friend or carer can usually sit in on your appointment if you want. Let the psychiatrist know that they'll be attending.

You can also have an interpreter, health professional or multicultural worker with you.

If you have the appointment in your GP's clinic, your GP might sit in with you.

What about privacy and confidentiality?

The same privacy and confidentiality requirements apply for face-to-face and online consultations.

The psychiatrist will take notes, but your consultation will not be recorded, unless you agree to it being recorded for treatment purposes.

Can I have my consultation with the psychiatrist by phone?

Psychiatrists don't usually offer consultations by phone. This is because seeing your face while you talk provides important information for the psychiatrist.

Sometimes, a psychiatrist who already knows you will give brief advice over the phone, but phone conversations aren't suitable for full consultations. In Australia, Medicare doesn't cover the cost of a phone consultation.

What if I need to cancel the appointment?

Online consultations can be complicated to set up, so do your best to keep the appointment.

If you need to cancel, let the psychiatrist know as soon as you can.

If you cancel close to the appointment time, there may be a cost involved. Speak to your psychiatrist for more information about their cancellation policy.