

Teletherapy for Spasmodic Dysphonia and Related Voice Conditions

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What is teletherapy and how does it work?

Teletherapy is receiving speech therapy virtually through a computer, tablet, or smart phone. It is like a “Zoom” or “Skype” online session, but more advanced with additional features, better audio, and most importantly, compliant with HIPAA privacy standards. You can participate in the session from anywhere (most easily from home!). Many platforms offer the option to share documents or screens between the client and clinician and have a “whiteboard feature” to be able to write.

Is teletherapy as effective as in person?

Yes! There are studies that show that services provided via teletherapy are just as effective as those in person. The American Speech Language Hearing Association (ASHA), recognizes teletherapy as an effective method of therapy delivery.

Why would I want to do teletherapy?

There are many benefits to teletherapy. To start, convenience is at the forefront! You can receive therapy without leaving your home. This is especially beneficial during the recent changes due to COVID-19 where in person sessions are no longer feasible. Teletherapy is also great to receive quality care you may not be able to get in your hometown (i.e. if you are in a more rural area or do not have specialists in your area), including across state lines. For example, since I am licensed in MA, CA, CT, and NY I am permitted to provide services from my home in MA to individuals in any of the above states, however, I would not be able to see someone in say, FL, as I am not licensed in that state. Many health care providers, including physicians are now turning to teletherapy to be able to still provide services to patients during these challenging times where physical travel is limited. Other benefits to teletherapy include being able to practice skills in real time that are directly relevant to challenges you are facing (i.e. speaking in virtual meetings, or on the phone, giving a presentation/lecture). You and the clinician can create “mock” scenarios like giving a lecture in real time with screen sharing of the presentation, allowing the clinician to view and assess real-time communication in the home if agreed upon, and practicing functional skills such as speaking in virtual meetings or on the phone.

Is it private and secure when I do teletherapy?

Before engaging in teletherapy with a provider you should make sure that you are engaging in sessions over a HIPAA-approved platform (Skype, FaceTime, the free version of Zoom, Google Hangouts are NOT HIPAA compliant and are not private platforms). Thus, these should not be used in any way for therapy purposes. Some examples of HIPAA compliant platforms are the Business versions of Zoom, Theraplatform, Blink, and more.

What do I need to be able to do teletherapy?

You will need a functioning smart device (laptop, desktop computer, tablet, iPhone) and a good Wifi connection (you may connect your ethernet cord to get better connection). Headphones are often beneficial to avoiding echo or audio issues. You will want a quiet and private place to be able to engage in sessions.

What are the drawbacks to teletherapy?

As with any smart device there is always the chance that technical issues may arise that may temporarily affect the session. Typically, as long as you and the treating provider have good Wifi signal, a quality platform, and good internet speed these should not be an issue. The other drawback to teletherapy is not having the ability to do physical manipulations or examinations of muscles that would be done in person (i.e. laryngeal massage is only trained in person and not via virtual therapy). Although typically not complex, teletherapy does require some level of familiarity and comfortability with use of technology, which may not be ideal for everyone.

Considerations for teletherapy?

Consider if you have the proper equipment (laptop with camera or smart device, headphones, good internet and private/quiet space). Consider if you would be okay doing sessions virtually – ask to set up a consultation or “test” call with your provider first to “test the waters” and your equipment. Some insurance providers will not reimburse for teletherapy and some providers are only private pay so these may be additional considerations. Some regulations are currently being loosened due to the COVID-19 epidemic but always check with your provider or insurance company prior to beginning visits. The last consideration is if you have an underlying medical or neurological condition that would prevent you from fully participating in sessions.

How do I get started in teletherapy?

Find a provider who offers teletherapy. Consider options such as insurance versus private pay, location and ability to be serviced by that provider depending on his/her licensure, platform choice, and accessibility.

Questions? You may visit the NSDA [website](http://dysphonia.org) (dysphonia.org) and [list](#) of healthcare providers or contact me at Christiejdeluca@gmail.com