

11. Can online consultations be as effective as in-person visits for treating pain?

Carla, 46, works as a teacher in a small town. After a period of intense stress and long hours sitting at her desk, she began to feel a burning sensation between her shoulder blades. With the nearest physiotherapy clinic more than an hour away, she hesitated to book an appointment. When her doctor suggested an online consultation, she was not convinced. *"How could someone help me without even touching me?"* she thought.

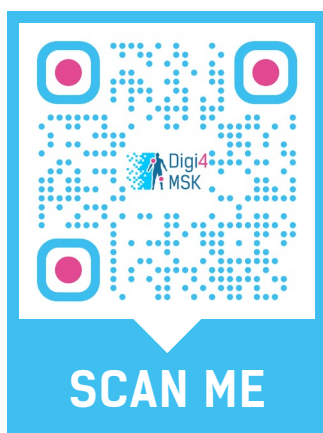
A week later, after another sleepless night, she gave it a try. The physiotherapist greeted her on video, asked detailed questions about her pain, daily habits, and workspace, and asked her to perform a few gentle movements while observing through the camera. Carla was surprised at how precisely he described what might be aggravating her pain.

He showed her how to get comfortable at her desk and asked her to demonstrate a few stretches. *"You'll do these on your own, but I'll check in next week"*, he said. Over the next days, Carla followed the plan carefully, writing down how she felt after each session.

During their next call, they compared notes and adapted the exercises. *"It feels strange"*, she admitted, *"but it actually works"*. She realized that what mattered most was not distance, but clear guidance, feedback, and her own participation.

That evening, as her shoulders finally began to relax, Carla thought that perhaps care could travel through a screen—when both sides stayed engaged.

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Skills you can build by watching the video:

- Understanding when accessing to online consultations can safely and effectively support pain management.
- Recognizing what aspects of care—communication, assessment, feedback—can work remotely.
- Learning how to prepare and participate actively in an online session for the best results.

YouTube link: <https://youtu.be/9Lv2NejBIK4>

11.1. How can online consultations help with pain?

Through video calls or chat, healthcare providers can:

1. Check your symptoms by talking about your pain history and triggers.
2. Adapt their physical assessment to an online format. For example, mobility and other tests can be performed from home with online supervision!
3. Provide medical and health advice like lifestyle changes, or exercises.
4. Guide self-management strategies, promote movement, and support daily pain relief. However, healthcare providers will refer to in-person care when thorough physical exams or specific treatments are required.

11.2. What are the benefits of telehealth for pain treatment?

1. **Convenience & accessibility.** No travel needed, ideal for people who have trouble moving or live far from healthcare centres.
2. **Ongoing support.** Easy check-in if necessary.
3. **Specialist access.** It allows consultations with experts who may not be available locally.
4. **Flexible access.** It allows scheduling at a convenient time and place.



11.3. What are the challenges of online consultations?

1. **Technology barriers.** Some people, especially older adults, may struggle with video calls.
2. **Physical exams needed.** In certain cases, healthcare providers need to see you in person.
3. **Connection issues.** Internet connectivity problems can affect consultation quality.
4. **Communication issues.** If they are non native speakers, or have hearing or cognitive challenges.

11.4. When to seek an in-person visit?

Online consultations are effective for many, but in-person care is needed if:

1. Pain is severe or worsening.
2. Imaging or hands-on treatment is required.
3. Serious symptoms appear (for instance fever, numbness, loss of strength or sudden weight loss).
4. Interventions like injections or manual therapy are indicated.
5. It is recommended by your healthcare professional.

Takeaway messages:

Online consultations can often be just as effective as in-person visits for treating pain, particularly for education, physical activity or exercise, and supporting self-management. However, some people face challenges with technology, and certain conditions require in-person care. Nonetheless, remember that your healthcare professional can also use simpler methods for reviews, such as instant messaging.