

# Communication during Covid-19: Use of video conferencing technology by people living with dementia

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## Abstract

**Background:** The use of videoconferencing technology has increased as an alternative communication method for people to retain social and clinical contact during Covid-19 restrictions. This study investigated the uptake, limitations and benefits of videoconferencing for people living with dementia (PLWD).

**Method:** Twenty-three PLWD, 87 caregivers (on behalf of PLWD) and 39 healthy control participants anonymously reported their experiences of using videoconferencing technology during the Covid-19 pandemic (PLWD: 38-90 years; controls: 32-100 years). The online survey ran between December 2020 and April 2021. Respondents represented experiences of people living with Alzheimer's Disease (AD; 27), Frontotemporal Dementia (FTD; 23), Primary Progressive Aphasia (PPA; 24), Posterior Cortical Atrophy (PCA; 22), Lewy Body Dementia (LDB; 7). Mann-Whitney U tests were used to compare Likert ratings of videoconferencing experiences between PLWD or diagnostic subgroups and controls.

**Result:** The majority of survey respondents that use videoconferencing technology reported an increased usage during the Covid-19 pandemic than before (85%). However, 28% of PLWD did not use videoconferencing at all, compared to 3% of healthy controls. Only 53% of PLWD reported they liked using videoconferencing technology compared to 67% of controls, and this was lowest for people with LBD (33%) or PCA (40%). Interestingly, 64% of people with FTD liked videoconferencing and rated it more engaging than traditional telephone calls compared to healthy controls ( $p=0.045$ ). People with AD, PCA and FTD found online meetings with multiple people more difficult than controls ( $p=0.036$ ;  $p<0.001$ ;  $p=0.030$ ). Qualitative responses to questions on telemedicine were mixed, with PLWD three times more likely to report overall negative consequences (e.g. "communication better face-to-face") than positive benefits (e.g. "less tiring") for cognitive clinic and dementia-related GP appointments, compared to face-to-face visits.

**Conclusion:** The use of videoconferencing by PLWD and healthy controls has increased during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, a significant proportion of PLWD surveyed are not able to use these technologies, with different profiles of uptake and enthusiasm across dementia subtypes. Our findings suggest that whilst representing a helpful alternative to face-to-face communication during the pandemic, videoconferencing (particularly in clinical settings) may be a significant barrier to communication for some people with cognitive impairment.