



Online Therapy: Yay or Nay?

Even during Covid-19, mental healthcare found a way to thrive by putting therapy services online. Covid-19 strained mental health for families, children, and anyone with a previously busy social life. Mental illnesses such as anxiety and depression became progressively more common as quarantine continued, according to a study from the [National Library of Medicine](#).

Online therapy spiked, with companies such as Better Help skyrocketing in popularity. The demand for therapy services was high, and thanks to the internet, the lack of in-person services was compensated for. A study was conducted that examined the effectiveness of online therapy during Covid-19, and the results showed its effectiveness, according to [ScienceDirect](#). Online therapy was able to combat anxiety and depression.



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However, those quarantine times have passed, and in-person therapy is back on the table. The demand for online therapy has shrunk, despite possible benefits, i.e., online therapy is cheaper, time-flexible, and easily accessible. For instance, [Cerebral](#) — an online therapy company — starts a subscription at \$30 a month, while in-person therapy can cost anywhere between \$60 to \$120 a session, according to [TalkToMira](#). And most online therapy websites advertise flexibility with the user's schedule.

But is online therapy as effective as visiting a professional in person? It depends on the severity of the mental illness; after all, many forms of trauma therapy incorporating EMDR — eye movement desensitization and processing — can be more difficult to replicate online than in person.

Regarding general effectiveness, though, a study was conducted about how well online cognitive behavioral treatment (CBT) worked by Plos One. Results showed that CBT can be just as effective in the short term. And when researching the differences between online and in-person therapy, there was no noticeable difference between effectiveness, according to [Taylor & Francis Online](#).

So, online therapy is not too bad — that is, up until recent scandals concerning privacy with online therapy. Better Help, the most infamous online therapy site, broke customer trust by secretly selling mental-health data to advertisers such as Facebook. Because this is illegal, the website was fined \$7.8 million, according to the [Federal Trade Commission](#). The company received backlash from users and a massive drop in popularity when its actions were discovered. Despite this setback, though, continuous streams of YouTuber sponsorships have been somewhat effective at making users forget about the incident.

Aside from legal scandals, Better Help has been under fire for having unprofessional professionals; according to [Newsweek](#), there are reports of therapists being late to sessions, trying to sell their novels



Written by [Elanor Bonta](#) on May 25, 2023

instead of doing their jobs, being in public areas while eating food, showing a lack of knowledge on mental health, and being insensitive — all of which are the opposite of their job requirements.

Online, it is undoubtedly easier to get away with being unprofessional, but Better Help has had too many instances where it has broken users' trust.

Despite these scandals, hypothetically, online therapy is as effective as it is cheap and accessible — and yet, 86 percent of participants in a study prefer face-to-face treatment if possible, according to [Nature](#). There is an assumption that in-person therapy is better, potentially due to the pros and cons of the respective therapy forms.

In-person therapy can allow more in-depth analysis due to nonverbal communication, which a therapist cannot catch from a screen. There are also a multitude of therapy techniques that can easily be provided in person, such as art, music, and play therapy. It is far easier to find in-person specialists for less-common mental illnesses. And although online therapy can take place in the comfort of one's home, a therapist's office is a more neutral space than home and can bring more comfort, according to [Psychology.org](#).

Overall, online therapy may work — but it is safe to say that Better Help is a company people should avoid due to its many scandals. The industry is far cheaper and more accessible than in-person, but its effectiveness really depends on a client's needs.



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