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## Using Technology to Manage the Caregiving Burden

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**For clients or prospects who are caregivers, new technologies can lighten the load and bring real peace of mind, as well as preserving independence and dignity for elder parents or other charges.**

Chances are, the majority of your clients will become caregivers for a relative, spouse or friend at some point during their relationship with you. Right now, some 65 million people—one third of the adult U.S. population—provide care to another adult. That number is only going to increase as the boomer generation reaches into their 80s and 90s.

Many people think of caregiving as a full-time, live-in responsibility. And while that is certainly sometimes the case, it is by no means the only alternative. The aging-in-place industry has grown tremendously over the past several years, and that trend will only continue. A variety of technology is available to help manage emergencies, medications, health records, and caregiver coordination. Here, we round up some of the most popular devices and services on the market. Use this guide to assist clients who need help or suggestions on managing their caregiving challenges.



### Getting emergency help

Personal Emergency Response Systems (PERS) are the most well-known caregiving devices. Every 11 seconds a senior falls, often with harmful results. Thankfully, technology has really provided a solution. The most basic version involves a wearable pendant with a button that can be pressed in case of emergency. More sophisticated versions include multiple sensors throughout the house and automatic alert triggers.

There are two types of alarm systems: monitored and unmonitored. Monitored alarm systems have a live person tracking activity in a call center to reduce false alarms and 911 calls. Unmonitored systems call selected numbers when the alarm is triggered, simply ringing until someone picks up. Many devices also have “fall alert,” which uses sensors to detect when a senior has fallen and sends the alert even if the wearer does not press the button.

Some big names for alert systems are [GreatCall](#), [MobileHelp](#), [Life Alert](#), and [Medical Guardian](#). There are many others. Most operate like cell phone carriers, charging a monthly fee for the alert service, in addition to device setup fees for some companies. Currently, the average rate for basic service is \$30 per month.

In such a crowded marketplace, it can be difficult to decide on the device and plan that works best for your family.

[Consumer Affairs](#), a forum of buyer’s guides and reviews, suggests asking the following questions:

- How does the company charge? Are prices fixed, or is there a contract period? How easy is it to cancel?

- How effective is it for your family's needs? Is there two-way communication? Is the system only for falls? Do you want the paramedics called every time?
- Is it safe for your loved one? Will the dispatcher be able to send the correct care? Can the system detect problems without someone pushing the button?
- What equipment is needed? Does it need a landline telephone (many do)? Who takes care of installation or maintenance?
- Will it work outside the home? Is there an app? How far is the coverage limit?

Companies that offer more global in-home security include [Wellness](#) and [TruSense](#). In addition to a wearable device, these services provide sensors that can be placed around the senior's home for increased emergency detection, such as if someone spends too long in the bathroom, or does not emerge from the bedroom. Certain triggers can be programmed—for example, if your mother hasn't made coffee by 10 a.m., you will be notified.

One final note: In earlier days, PERS wearables were usually clunky and ugly, so many care recipients would refuse to wear them. Now, devices are becoming more stylish and less obtrusive, including options such as watches or pins.

## Medication reminders

As we age, chances are that our list of medications will grow. It can be difficult for a senior living at home or even the caregiver to remember everything. A variety of devices make the daily pill routine much easier.

Major names in this category include [Reminder Rosie](#), [MedMinder](#), and [TabSafe](#). Reminder Rosie is a programmable, talking clock that can be used for many types of reminders. The caregiver might program it to say, "Dad, time to take your blue pill with a glass of water. I love you!" MedMinder and TabSafe are digital pill dispensers. The caregiver fills the medicine tray, then at pill time the device flashes or beeps or otherwise alerts the senior to take his medications. In some cases the device is connected to a smartphone app that informs the caregiver when medicine has or has not been taken.

[SafeWise](#), a site that aggregates information about home security and safety, offers the following considerations:

- Is this device something you'll be able to easily set up and use? Will it fit into your routine?
- Is it battery operated? How often will you need to change the batteries?
- Does the care recipient need visual or audio reminders? How loud is it/how clear are the compartments?
- Do you need verifiable proof that the medicine was taken?
- Do you need a device that locks? How easily is it tampered with?

## Health tracking devices

The current trend in health tracking and introduction of smartwatches mean that it is easier than ever to find something that can assess key statistics as well as serve in case of emergency. Perhaps just as importantly, the increasing prevalence of health tracking devices means that seniors may already be familiar with them and less likely to resist their implementation.

Given that each condition is unique, it is difficult to provide a roundup of the most popular devices. More are coming onto the market every year. For the basics, [Fitbit](#) and similar smartwatches will tell you about heart rate and sleeping

patterns. Other devices include the [Omron Evolv](#), a blood pressure monitor that lets the care recipient measure, record, and share the data with her family and doctor; and the [AliveCor Kardia Band](#), which uses EKG technology to pick up palpitations, shortness of breath, and other stroke risks.

It is best to determine exactly what you need from a health tracking devices, and look for one that is recognized in its field.

## Coordinating care apps

Caregiving technology doesn't always need to involve purchasing gadgets. Many helpful apps are available on your smartphone, tablet, or desktop. They help accomplish everything from simply keeping track of appointments and medications to organizing multiple caregiver schedules and searching databases for caregiving advice.

If you want to build a community of caregivers and network between family members and friends, [CaringBridge](#), [Lotsa Helping Hands](#), and [Caring Village](#) are good places to start. Each one offers a slightly different take on seeking help and supporting the caregiver and care recipient.

Some apps such as [Elder 411](#), [Balance: For Alzheimer's Caregivers](#), and [Dementia Caregiver Solutions](#) are more information-based. They provide libraries of medical research, advice for caregivers, and various abilities to bookmark or share articles with contacts.

Some mainstream apps can be used for communication purposes, and some are aimed at seniors. [Skype](#), [FaceTime](#), and [Zoom](#) can facilitate meetings between caregivers, care recipients and far-flung family members. [GrandCare](#) includes a suite of products aimed at connecting seniors with their families, such as a giant touchscreen which requires no computer skills to use. There are also social network alternatives to Facebook such as [SeniorMaze](#), [AARP community](#), [My Boomer Place](#), and [The Cool Grandma](#).

Finally, some apps are a place to organize patient logs, to-do lists, files, reminders, and more. These include [CareZone](#) and [Unfrazzle](#). They are in general just digital updates of what once used to be stored on paper.

## Miscellaneous

The list of technologies available to help with caregiving just keeps growing. In the newly burgeoning era of "smart homes," data and assistance are available almost at the touch of a button—or an icon. Here are just a few more technologies worth considering for specific challenges.

- **Housekeeping robots.** The [iRobot Family](#) of devices automate house cleaning to aid less-mobile seniors.
- **Sound sensors/** The [OtoSense](#) app translates doorbells, alarms, telephone rings, and other sounds into visual alarms for mobile devices, allowing hard-of-hearing seniors to react to stimuli around them in real time.
- **Voice activation devices.** For example, [Amazon's Alexa](#), can turn on lights and music among other uses.
- **Digital vaults.** It's a good idea to store all important documents and data in one secure place. Major names in this category include [Microsoft's HealthVault](#), [WebMD's HealthManager](#), and [Patient Ally](#). There are dozens, and most are free.

Aging-in-place technology is only one aspect of a complete caregiving plan. It is essential that your clients have a plan in place before crisis hits—one that covers medical, legal, financial, and personal issues. For more information, check out Horsemouth's [Savvy Caregiving](#) program.

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