

Aging-In-Place Tech Making Staying Home Easier

Older adults who want to age in place have new technology that makes it easier, including smart home and medical management systems.

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LOS ANGELES — It's natural to want to remain in your home as you age, and more than 75% of adults older than 50 are planning to do just that. At home, everything's familiar, and you can maintain a level of independence. In many cases, living at home also provides a financial advantage.

But aging in place living independently at home for as long as possible requires a strategy to support all aspects of your well-being, including:

- Cognitive health
- Daily activities of living
- Mental health
- Mobility
- Physical health
- Safety
- Socialization

Fortunately, new and improved technologies provide solutions for older adults who want to live on their own as they age. While you may not need all this high-tech assistance now, it's good to know what's available. Your technology needs will likely change over time, and understanding your options may influence where you'll live later in life.

Here are six technology tools that make it easier to age in place:

1. Smartphones and tablets

Most people use smartphones and tablets well before they're considered "aging adults." But this technology is especially helpful for people older than 65 living at home.

The assistance and convenience that smart devices offer constantly change and grow with the development of new apps. But common ways that smartphones and tablets support older adults include:

- Assistive technology, such as dictation, text-to-speech and visual support, to help with hearing and vision issues

- Cognitive engagement in the form of brain games
- AI voice assistants such as Siri and Alexa, which allow for hands-free communication using email, text and phone calls for people struggling with fine motor skills, mobility or cognitive decline
- Reminders for anything, including medication, appointments and hydration
- Socialization through phone calls, video calls and access to social networks

2. Smart home systems

It's not news that you can use technology to control basic home functions such as lighting, temperature and doorbells. You may already employ smart technologies to answer your door, close the garage or change the thermostat when you aren't at home. But as you age, this technology becomes increasingly helpful when you are home.

Older adults and their caregivers can use smart home systems to regulate the temperature and lighting to ensure comfortable and safe surroundings all day, every day. Smart technology can also translate household sounds, such as doorbells, kitchen timers and ringing phones, into a physical sensation for people with hearing loss. If mobility issues arise, you can choose to make minor adjustments to your home environment from a chair, without the added risk of falling.

Newer smart home technology even adapts to you. Over time, it can learn about you and your environment and then adjust to improve your experience.

3. Remote health monitoring

You may already use wearable devices to monitor your health and fitness. They can help you keep an eye on your heart rate, calories, steps and more.

As you age, your providers may be interested in specific markers of your health and recommend you use specific monitoring devices to measure those markers. Remote health monitoring devices can track and share:

- Vital signs, such as blood pressure, body temperature and oxygen levels
- Sleep patterns
- Physical activity

Your provider can receive the data directly to evaluate your health and identify potential issues quickly. These personalized health care solutions are especially critical for managing chronic conditions.

4. Medication management systems

If you need to take multiple medications or take medication multiple times a day, it can be hard to stay on track. The reminders found on smartphones may be enough for some people, but others may need more support.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that nearly 35% of adults ages 60 to 79 take five or more prescription drugs. Automated medication dispensers send notifications when it's time to take your medicine. They also dispense the

medication to ensure you take the correct dosage.

5. Sensor technology

Innovative technologies now use sensors around the house to collect data about the person living there. They can exchange data with other sensors over the internet to record your daily routine. Sensor technology can track:

- Physical activity and motion to sense when you eat, sleep or even fall
- Vital signs to identify any dangerous changes to your physical health
- Sound to alert caregivers of coughing and audible pain or distress

Sensors help caregivers monitor health care data around the clock. They can also send alerts when daily living trends are unusual.

Some sensor systems are comprehensive and monitor the whole house. Others are used to monitor one specific thing. Advanced sensor technology systems can consolidate the data collected with other clinical and personal records to offer providers a comprehensive health assessment.

6. Personal emergency response systems (PERS)

Fall-detecting devices, such as pendants or wristbands, are not new. But the technology is constantly evolving.

Personal emergency response systems (PERS) offer peace of

mind for caregivers and provide a way to get immediate help in the event of a fall or medical emergency. Newer PERS include GPS, allowing emergency services to quickly pinpoint your location in case of a medical event while away from home. Many PERS also offer two-way communication.

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