

5 Useful Resources for Caregivers of Older Adults



Are you one of the growing number of Americans caring for an older adult with health issues? You are not alone. Throughout the U.S., there are almost 66 million family caregivers and another 3.2 million professional caregivers in the healthcare workforce. Caregivers offer critical care and support for many older adults. Yet, they juggle many roles and responsibilities. Often caregiving is a physically and emotionally demanding role and can take a toll on your health.

Assistive devices and technology can help to lower stress levels by making many daily tasks easier. There are many options to fit your needs and comfort levels and many caregiver tasks can be eased using just simple technology. The following are just a few examples of assistive devices and technology to help with common concerns in caregiving. Together, these products and services can ease the demands on you and improve the quality of life of older adults in your care.

1. Bathing Assistance

Bathing assistance brings challenges for caregivers—risk of injury to your back and concern about preventing falls and maintaining the dignity of the person in your care. Bath lifts attach to the wall or bathtub and help seniors get in and out of the shower. This can limit unnecessary

strain on your back and cut the chances of an injury. Chairs for the tub can also offer comfortable seating for seniors and reduce their risk of falling. Other little known products include specially designed clothing to wear in the shower. These garments give caregivers access to wash body parts, while still giving seniors some privacy. These products help ease caregivers' worries and increase safety.

2. Memory Aids

Older adults may be coping with memory issues that can create some hurdles to completing simple and complex tasks. Caregivers can use newer technology to guide seniors through basic steps. For example, one application is used with an iPad to prompt seniors to complete a series of tasks such as using the toilet, taking off their pajamas, and brushing their teeth. Pictures accompany the prompts to make it easier to follow. Caregivers can also record their voice for each activity prompt.

3. Medication Reminders

Medication reminders are a specific type of memory aid that supports a vitally important daily task. Use of electronic medication reminders can significantly improve the chance that older adults take their medications properly. There are a growing number of electronic pillboxes and medication reminder systems on the market that have audio, visual and vibrating alarms. Some gadgets allow seniors and caregivers to see photos of the medication to help with pill recognition, set multiple reminder alerts, and customize settings to avoid confusing dosages. Other devices are enabled for voice recordings, or are connected to a large monitor or cell phone. A range of medication reminder systems are available for use on computer tablets and smart phones. They can all be set up according to the specific medication needs of the individual.

4. Home and Remote Safety Monitoring

Caregivers often worry about whether their loved one will be safe at home alone. Several new technologies have emerged to help monitor seniors at home. Some systems work through a wireless connection between a senior's home computer or tablet and a caregiver's cell phone. In addition to monitoring activity, features can include video messaging and email to provide an easy communication portal between the senior and caregiver.

Other systems use sensors to monitor seniors' activities such as detecting falls or any out of the ordinary activity. Sensors are placed by a doorway or next to a bed to detect movement. Still other monitoring devices can be attached to doors or exits and alert caregivers if a loved one has wandered outside a desired perimeter. Emergency alert systems worn on the wrist or around the neck are most commonly used. They are activated by seniors when they need help.

5. Online Support and Care Management

Many free resources online can help you as a caregiver. For example, there are several websites devoted to supporting caregivers. Support communities such as www.Caregivers.com and www.Lotsahelpinghands.com provide information exchange, resources, and emotional support.

Other websites, such as www.CareLinx.com, can connect you with home care workers in your area. They offer references and profiles on each home care worker. Lastly, care management websites, like www.HealthVault.com provide caregivers with an online system to help in organizing medical appointments, medications, medical history, and important contact information. All of this can be shared with other family or caretakers.

To Learn More

The technology discussed here is just a small sample of the assistive technology (AT) available.

AbleData is an in-depth website and resource portal, covering a large range of products and approaches for assisting caregivers and elderly. For more information, call 1-800-227-0216. You can also visit the AbleData website at <https://abledata.acl.gov/>.

Throughout the AbleData website, you will find useful tools and devices for easing your caregiving and improving life for the person you care for. There are many options out there and some of these likely will meet your needs and resources.

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Address: AbleData, 103 W Broad Street, Suite 400, Falls Church, Virginia 22046

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AbleData

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Telephone: 800-227-0216 (Se habla español.)
TTY: 703-992-8313
Fax: 703-356-8314

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