

Smart Technology Enables Independent Living for Seniors

January 12, 2016

<https://www.theseniorlist.com/2016/01/smart-technology-enable-independent-living-for-seniors/>

The concept of aging in place holds considerable attraction for many of us. Not content with the idea of giving up our independence, we prefer to stay at home, as independently as possible, as long as possible. Smart technology in the home is making it possible for many older adults to do just that.

An Increasing Need for Assistance

According to a recent study by the Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University, it is estimated that between 2015 and 2035, the number of people over the age of 75 living alone will nearly double from 6.9 million to 13.4 million.

More than 90 percent of individuals aged 65 and older with disabilities live in private homes. Many of them live with a spouse, partner, or family members. However, 35 percent of those over the age of 80 live alone.

Smart technology

Smart homes provide a way for older adults to live independently.

The Rise of Smart Technology

As the abilities and health of an increasingly older population decline, innovative technologies are emerging to address the challenges of independent senior living. Technologies that were unheard of in years past are now viable solutions for older adults living alone.

Laurie Orlov, an aging-in-place technology analyst, observes: “We’ve entered into the era of low-cost, miniaturized, technological capabilities that enable smarter caregiving and greater independence.”

1. Smart Detection Devices

Smart stove alarms alert older adults to potentially dangerous situations in the kitchen. More than just smoke detectors, which only sound when smoke is actually present, new stove alarms sound alerts before toxic gases are produced, helping older adults prevent potential fire hazards.

Smart detection devices are available to detect water leaks and air quality issues. Smart bath monitors help by detecting potential overflow issues and shutting off water before the bathtub becomes overfilled.

2. Smart Medication Reminders

One of the more worrisome issues for older adults living independently is appropriate medication scheduling. Smart medication pillboxes offer audible or visual cues for older adults to prompt them to take their meds at the proper time.

Additionally, smart pillboxes can send remote alerts to caregivers when their loved one retrieves medication. This provides peace of mind both for the older adult and the caregiver.

3. Motion-Activated Monitoring and Reminders

To prevent fumbling around in the dark, motion-activated lights can be installed in the homes of those wishing to live independently. Motion-activated reminders can be installed and customized to the routines of older adults. For instance, a motion-sensitive device by an entranceway can be set to trigger a reminder for an older person to lock the door or check the identity of the person knocking before opening the door.

Smart door bells provide a video picture of visitors to help older adults decide whether or not to answer the door to a stranger.

Smart home security systems can be programmed to automatically lock doors, arm security systems, and alert homeowners and caregivers remotely if issues arise.

4. Control from a Favorite Chair

For those with mobility issues, there are several assistive devices available. Smart thermostats can be activated by remote control or even by voice command, thereby eliminating the need to get up to adjust temperature settings. Such devices can also be monitored remotely by caregivers to ensure that temperatures in the homes of older ones remain comfortable and safe.

Similarly, personal emergency response systems enable seniors to quickly get the assistance they need in case of emergency. Some devices can be set to call, not only emergency responders, but also caregivers and family who need to be notified in the event of an emergency.

5. Other Assistive Technologies

Other available smart technology include landline and mobile phones equipped with large, high-visibility displays that are both easy to see and manipulate with stiff fingers; keyless entry locks for those with arthritic hands, and curtains or blinds that can be operated with remote control devices.