

ORGANIZATION NEWS

Information/Education Page

Technology for Remote Caregiving: A Guide for Caregivers Providing Care at a Distance



Older adults with poor physical or cognitive function often require support from their caregivers. Proper care can improve function, safety, and quality of life. Many caregivers are unable to attend to the needs of their loved one in person because of time constraints or physical distance yet are still committed to overseeing their loved one’s well-being and needs on a regular basis. This is true whether the person lives in their own home, in an assisted living facility, or in a nursing home. Mobile phones and personal computers can help caregivers communicate with their loved ones and provide care remotely even when in-person care is not possible.

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic highlighted the effect of isolation among older individuals, and physical distancing guidelines have created challenges for caregivers whose loved ones do not live in the same household. Technology can be a great resource and allow caregivers to connect, monitor, and support their loved ones remotely. The need for technology to support caregivers existed before COVID-19 and is anticipated to persist long-term.

Mobile technologies can minimize barriers to care in long-distance situations. These devices are gaining popularity among users of all ages.¹ They provide access to information and services, increase communication, and help with care coordination. [Table 1](#) illustrates common technologies to support remote caregiving. [Table 2](#) and [appendix 1](#) describe software applications (apps) that can be useful for remote caregivers.

Apps are software programs that perform specific tasks on a device.² Apps run inside the operating system of a device. Most apps are available through virtual stores such as the “App Store,” “Google Play Store,” or “Microsoft Store.” Many apps are free to download (basic version), but others require a 1-time purchase or have a monthly or annual fee. Some apps can be downloaded on smartphones or tablets, whereas others are only designed for computers. Desktop apps work on a laptop or desktop computer. Mobile apps work on a smartphone. [Table 2](#) describes examples of apps that may be useful for remote caregiving.

Table 1 Communication and monitoring devices to support remote caregiving

Tablets		Smartphones		Computers (Desktop/Laptop)	
iOS*	Android	iOS	Android	Windows	Macintosh
Examples					
iPad	Samsung Galaxy Tab	iPhone	Samsung or Motorola phones	Lenovo, MacBooks, Dell, or HP	

* iOS systems work with Apple devices (iPhones, iPads, etc), and Android systems work with a number of devices including Samsung, Google, and Asus devices.

Table 2 Apps for aid caregivers in remote caregiving and health management

<p>Social Media: Keep a loved one connected by sharing pictures and messages.</p> <p>➤ Facebook and Instagram</p> <p>Can be accessed through web-based connections, eg, https://www.facebook.com/</p>	<p>Video Conferencing: AppsProvide face-to-face, real-time conversations, eg, engaging in dinner conversation or watching a grandchild play.</p> <p>➤ FaceTime, Zoom, Skype, Facebook Portal, and Amazon Echo Show</p> <p>Can be done through downloaded apps or web-based sources, eg, https://zoom.us/, https://www.skype.com/en/</p>	<p>Messaging: Used to send quick notes to loved ones or to coordinate among caregivers.</p> <p>➤ Standard texting on phones or tablets</p> <p>➤ WhatsApp, Facebook, Messenger, Telegram, and Viber</p> <p>Some computers feature messaging apps, eg, MacBooks can be setup to send and receive the same text messages as your iPhone. WhatsApp and Telegram messaging apps can also be used on a computer.</p>	<p>Smart Home Devices (Smart Speakers, Voice Assistance and Displays)</p> <p>Enable face-to-face, voice calling, reminders/alarms, environmental controls, and asking questions.</p> <p>➤ Amazon Echo, Google Nest, and Apple HomePod</p> <p>Smart Home plugs, switches, lighting, doorbells, door locks, and video cameras</p> <p>May remotely provide safety, security, and assistance in the home.</p> <p>➤ Ring Doorbell and August Smartlock</p> <p>May require a paid subscription (such as Amazon Prime) and internet connection.</p>
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Important considerations when deciding which apps to use

Although there are many benefits to adopting technologies to support remote caregiving, it is important to pick the technology that will work best for you and your loved one. Here are a few things to consider when choosing a smart device or app:

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Appendix 1 Apps for Aid Caregivers in Remote Caregiving and Health Management

Memory Reminder Apps

Memory reminder apps assist with communication, thinking, and scheduling for your loved one.

- ∅ MindMate — For a healthy brain App: engages users in daily activities to support a healthy brain. Activities include games (problem solving, memory, and attention, etc), exercise videos, health tips, and recipes. This app also provides data on performance in these activities. Currently free and available on the App Store.
- ∅ StickMe Notes Sticky Notes App: for writing and virtually posting sticky notes that look like the real version. These notes can be set with an alarm, so the user remembers to look at them. This app has a subscription fee after a 7-day free trial and is available on the App Store
- ∅ Remember Me: Memory Books App: for creating a personalized picture books that can include photos with names. Currently free and available on the App Store.

Health and Fitness Apps

Health and Fitness apps can be used to check and track health and well-being. Many fitness apps can be paired with smart watches to track your loved one's activity patterns. Depending on the app and settings, data may be sharable. Some health and fitness apps require users to periodically export the health data from a personal device to a caregiver device.

- ∅ Fitbit: Health & Fitness App (paired with a Fitbit wristband): available on the App Store and Google Play Store and currently free.
- ∅ Fitness App (paired with an Apple watch): found on the App Store and is free.

Pain and Safety Monitoring Apps

Many apps may be used to help someone monitor their loved ones' pain and safety.³

- ∅ PainChek App: uses facial expression to assess pain or discomfort. Currently free and available on the App Store and Google Play Store Australia.
- ∅ Pain Rating Scales App: features pain scales based on body language observation. Currently free and available on the Google Play Store.
- ∅ Find My App: can track of a loved one's location in instances of wandering. This app sends the users location to those listed as "friends." Currently free on the Apple Store.

Apps to Assist in Providing Care

Care planning apps can help caregivers manage and coordinate care with and for their loved ones.

- ∅ Your Care Card App: creates personalized profile cards identifying a loved one and describing his or her specific needs; likes and dislikes; and preferred foods, activities, and music. This app allows multiple people to be added to the "care team." Currently free and available on the App Store.

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- ∅ Dementia Talk App: for behavior tracking, personalized care plans, medication lists, caregiver health advice, relaxation supports, and resource links. Currently free and available on the App Store and Google Play store.
- ∅ CogniCare App: tips, educational videos and readings, activity ideas, and responses to caregiver's questions. Currently free and available through the App Store or Google Play Store.

Will my loved one get the necessary support to use this device or app?

Determine if your loved one will need assistance to use the device or app. If support is needed, coordinate with the care recipient, caregivers, and the health care staff to build a plan enabling the person to use the technology.

Does the intended user have experience using the device or have the ability to learn?⁴

Today's technology is designed to be intuitive, friendly, and simple to use. However, if a person does not have experience using a specific technology device, trying to do so may cause frustration, anxiety, or discouragement. Make sure the person has (1) the ability to use or learn to use a device and/or app or (2) someone is available to assist in using the device.

Is the app the right one for me and/or for my loved one considering visual, hearing, and movement challenges?

Consider the size of lettering and icons in an app. Some apps feature icons (eg, arrows, start, or send buttons) that would be difficult for someone with unsteady hands to manage.

Many devices allow users to adjust the font or icon size. Check the device settings for *accessibility features*. You may want to use the magnifying option to make things bigger or enable voice over capabilities.

How do I know if the app is safe and trustworthy?

Some apps ask users to enter personal information. Review the company or billing source to ensure that it is trustworthy before sharing your personal information. Here are some suggestions on what to look for before entering your personal information:

- ∅ Do some research. Most download platforms have customer reviews on the apps they offer. Many apps also have websites featuring other apps the company has developed. Major publishers of popular apps are less likely put out malicious software.
- ∅ Check the SSL Certificate at the URL of the website. When purchasing through a website, make sure the website address begins with "https" instead of "http." Websites that begin with "https" are secured through SSL technology, which keeps your internet connection secure and protects your personal information and data.
- ∅ Carefully verify permissions and user agreement. Many apps ask for more permissions than they need. Carefully read the permission requests before accepting them.
- ∅ Consider purchasing a security software. Examples include Norton, Sophos, and Intego antivirus software.

Is this app compatible with the device I and/or my loved one typically use?⁴

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Many apps work on both tablets and smartphones, but some do not. Some apps only work with specific brands (eg, Apple vs Samsung). Check if the app can be downloaded and used on both your device and your loved one's.

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