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Tech to Help Monitor the Elderly

New Gadgets and Systems Take Burden Off Kids, Help Parents Stay Independent Longer

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Nursing homes for are costly but new technology is helping elderly Americans stay independent. Gerontologist Alexis Abramson showed off devices that can help monitor older family members.

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(CBS) It's a role reversal that many Americans go through -- adult children taking care of their elderly parents.

And new technologies are helping to take the burden off the kids -- and helping parents remain independent.

Jean Burkhart, 80, enjoyed living independently. Five years ago, however, she suffered a seizure while alone in her Florida home. More than four critical hours passed before her daughter discovered what happened.

Carol Roberts, Burkhart's daughter, said, "I called to wish her a happy Mother's Day and found her confused."

In an instant, managed care became a necessity for Jean, but like a growing number of older Americans, she wasn't ready for a nursing home.

Burkhart said, "I wanted to age in my home and

not go to a long term care facility or a personal care facility."

Burkhart and Roberts looked into alternatives and found the GrandCare System. It's a high-tech set of sensors installed throughout the home that monitors and sends reports about Jean's movements to family members down the street -- or halfway around the globe for as little as $50 a week. It provides a realistic alternative to nursing home care, where the average price tag is more than $50,000 per year.

Edward Schneider, dean emeritus at the Leonard Davis School of Gerontology at the University of Southern California, told **CBS News**, "Most people want to live in their own homes and technology can enable people to do this. Using technology they can stay where they want to stay."

While GrandCare allows Burkhart to live on her own and gives Roberts peace of mind, there are other benefits for the entire family.

Burkhart said, "It's sort of comforting to know that they can check on me. I'm really comfortable. I don't mind the sensors."

Roberts said, "I'm not ready to have mom live with me, and I don't think she's really ready to have me live with her."

Sensors systems -- like the one that Burkhart uses -- are just one part of the many new technologies available to aging parents. Here are a few more recommended by Alexis Abramson, a lifestyle gerontologist, on **"The Early Show"**:

TRACKING SYSTEMS
Tracking systems these days have access to GPS technology. That means that you can pinpoint the location of any senior that might be lost, fallen or confused.

Philip's Life Line
Philips Lifeline users push the button of a pendant that can be worn around the neck,

alerting the Lifeline call center. The button worn around the neck is light, about an ounce. AutoAlert offers all the benefits of our Standard Lifeline Medical Alert Service-push the button for help at any time-plus an added layer of protection: Lifeline with AutoAlert is the only pendant-style help button that can automatically place a call for help if it detects a fall and you're unable to push the button yourself.
Cost: $50 per month

Mobilehelp
Connects a user with a live operator when the button on its small white unit is pushed. Equipped with GPS technology that can locate a user. This system is very easy for a mature adult to handle, big buttons, and easy to read. Also, if for whatever reason the bush is pushed by accident, it has an easy reset button. The help button also comes on a wristband/watch form for easy carriage.
Cost: $35 per month

Wellcore Quick Pick Up
One in three adults age 65 or older falls each year; about a quarter of those suffer moderate to severe injuries. Welcome Wellcore's "I've fallen and I can't get up" sensor, worn on a belt or in a pocket. Using algorithms that understand a person's walking patterns, Wellcore, headquartered in San Jose, Calif., designed a tiny, GPS sensor that can blast an alert when disaster strikes; in an extreme fall, a 24-hour monitoring service will alert an ambulance. The service works with any Wellcore-compatible cell phone (contracts to be announced shortly). Another bonus of this tracking system? It can detect the difference between walking, running or a fall. It records the number of paces each day, which means that the senior user can log their activities and monitor their athletic progress from day to day. On the market since May.
Cost: $199/Monthly fee $50

ActiveCare Personal Assistance Link
The PAL offers one touch communication to care specialists from anywhere at any time. The PAL looks like a cell phone, but is easier to operate with large buttons and

quick one-touch access to your family, friends, and 24/7 Care Center. This unit can travel and is covered anywhere you have cell phone coverage. If an event occurs where the senior needs medical assistance, they need but press a button to be connected to live care specialist as well as allow you to reach out to contacts such as family or friends.
Cost: $59 per month

MEDICAL MONITORING
Knowing where the elderly are can be extremely helpful, but what about monitoring their day to day health? Are they taking their medication? How is their blood pressure? Have they had a sudden weight drop? Is their homecare assistant taking the proper vitals every day? The tools below can help caregivers rest at ease that their elderly loved ones are safe.

GrandCare Systems
A system of customized sensors for those with advanced physical ailment. GrandCare's available touch-screen display lets users receive e-mail messages and photographs. An operator picks up when the button is pushed on a MobileHelp device; it also has GPS technology. Another bonus for the GrandCare Systems is that it allows an at home caregiver to record vital medical statistics for patients as well.
Cost: $2000-8000, Plus $15-25 daily fee

Philips Medication Dispensing Service
The Philips Medication Dispensing Service reminds users to take their pills; if it's ignored, the service alerts a designated care giver. Philips provides an easy-to-use dispenser that helps maintain the proper medication schedule. The elderly patient hears an audio reminder when it's time to take their pills. And at the push of a button, their medication is dispensed to them at the proper times.
COST: $80 per month

Ideal Life
Whether the problem is weight fluctuation, blood pressure or diabetes Ideal Life has

the problem covered. There is a base unit that coordinates the armband blood pressure monitor, the glucose testing system and weight scale. When the measurements are taken on any of these device, the data is sent to the base, which passes the information along to senior's healthcare team. It allows their loved ones to rest easier, knowing that the doctors and nurses are getting consistent readings every day.

Cost: These products are not available directly for consumers yet. Please check with your health plan provider to see how much is covered.

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