

More Assistive Devices for Seniors
The third in a three part series on assistive technology
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In the last issue, we discussed “high tech” assistive devices for people with vision, hearing and motor problems. This article is about “high tech” monitoring devices.

- Q. My dad lives with us. He has Parkinson’s and has trouble with his balance. He gets up at night and has fallen a number of times. Is there anything that will notify me when he gets out of bed so I can assist him to the bathroom?
- A. A wireless Remote Bed Alarm is a pressure sensitive pad placed on the bed, a transmitter and a wireless receiver. A wireless signal is sent from the transmitter to the receiver when the person leaves the pressure pad, alerting the caregiver with an audible alarm. Some devices are the MALEM Enuresis Wireless Remote Bed Alarm (Smart Caregiver Corp. 1-800-650-3637 or at www.smartcaregivercorp.com*) or Drive Medical 13606 Chair and Bed Patient Alarm (www.amazon.com*).
- Q. Mom has Alzheimer’s, is incontinent and no longer can tell me when she is wet. Is there something that will notify me when she is wet so I can change her?
- A. A wireless alarm will alert you when wetness is detected. A very small wetness sensor (smaller than a postage stamp) transmits a signal to the receiver and sounds an alarm when wetness is detected. Some models allow you to choose between various tones, a vibrating alarm or a flashing light. One such device is the MALEM Enuresis Alarm. (The Bedwetting Store 1-800-214-9605 or www.bedwettingstore.com*)
- Q. My parents sometimes forget to take their medicines. I can’t call to remind them every few hours. How can I remind them to take their medicines?
- A. Several devices will give them cues to take their medicines. Some watches can be set to give alarms or verbal reminders at pre-set times of the day. Counter or tabletop devices that feature a digital clock and recording capability can provide several voice reminders a day. (B. Independent, Inc. 913-390-0247 or www.bindependent.com*)

Another solution for medication (and other) reminders is software that runs on a PDA (such as a Palm Pilot or other Pocket PC) under Windows Pocket PC operating system. Alarms ring and a text message appears for each alarm sounded. The software automatically keeps a history file of medication records and how well your loved one is keeping to the dosing schedule. This file can be uploaded to a PC for the caregiver’s use. (PillPALTM e-pill, LLC. 1-800-549-0095 or www.epill.com*) Another system is a stand alone electronic device Rx Master from Excalibur Electronics that even includes a built-in pill drawer. (www.excaliburelectronics.com)

- Q. Dad has Alzheimer’s and lives with me. I work at home and am not always able to keep an eye on him while I’m conducting business. He has wandered off several times and once was gone for a day. Fortunately the police found him. How can I be notified if he’s opening a door to the outside in another part of the house?

A. If dad still responds to verbal commands there are products that will allow the caregiver to pre-record a short message such as “Don’t touch the door.” Or “Turn around and come see me.” the message will keep repeating until the person steps out of the motion detector’s range. One such device is The Talking Sign. Contact Alimed, Inc. 1-800-225-2610 or at www.alimed.com. *

If dad no longer responds to verbal instructions you may try a conventional door alarm. An alarm or chime will sound when the door is opened. If the caregiver makes a mistake they can quickly close the door, as there is a second or two delay. Combining this alarm with a chain lock allows the door to be opened just enough to set off the alarm, but not enough to let the person exit. Door alarms come in wireless mode as well. Contact The Alzheimer’s Store 1-800-752-3238 or at www.thealzheimersstore.com. *

Q. Dad lives at home alone. He is getting increasingly frail. My siblings and I worry about his health and safety, but he refuses to move to a care community. Is there anything to monitor him and ease our worry about him?

A. There is a device that dad can wear on his wrist that automatically monitors his well-being 24 hours a day. During the first four days of use the unit adapts to the users normal activity level by measuring movement, skin temperature and skin conductivity. If the device detects a significant change in the users activity level it sends an alarm to the caregivers via a wireless transmitter to a telephone network. It can notify if it taken off or put back on, if it has low batteries or connection problems, and can even notify caregivers if a dementia patient leaves the house. One such device is Vivago Wristcare. Contact the distributor: Vivatec Limited, Crane House, Tel: +44 870 2430 999 or at www.vivatec.co.uk. *

Another type of 24/7 monitoring system is one that places sensors around the house. It “learns” the normal behavior of the user and alerts the caregivers by email, text message, page, fax or telephone if the user does not follow his normal routines by a certain time. (Examples: the user has not exited the bedroom by a specific hour or has not exited the bathroom within an hour, or if their meal preparation routine has changed.) One such system is QuietCare Home Health Security System. Contact ADT 1-866-746-7238 or at www.adt.com*

Still another type of monitoring system is Internet based and has videoconferencing capability between the person being monitored and a number of caregivers or interested parties. It also can create reminders that can be remotely set to reoccur on a set schedule by caregivers. It has an easy to use interface for the users and caregivers. One such system is AttentiveCare. Contact Caregiver Technologies (405) 809-3573 or at www.caregivertech.com*

* Note: Products cited are examples of technology available, NOT endorsements by the authors. Other website to search include www.activeforever.com and