

Then I sent him the grandPad, a simplified tablet designed for seniors who have yet to embrace the digital age. Within a day, my father had taken his first selfie. Within two, he had become addicted to FreeCell, a computer game, and had more or less gamely waded into the World Wide Web, though he confided to me that he didn't much trust it.

Using the grandPad's camera, he gave me a virtual tour of the Florida condo he shares with his second wife. I did the same with my house. Then I introduced him to my son Cole, age 21. We talked about whether he looked like a less jowly, more handsome version of me.

For 28 years, my father and I didn't speak. (That's a story for another time.) So he had never met my son, daughter or ex-wife. But now I touch base with my dad every few days via the grandPad. And we're hardly the only ones using technology to bridge the span of years and miles.

By 2030, one out of five Americans will be 65 or older. As has been widely reported, this cohort will place an enormous burden on our health care and retirement systems. It will also likely put an equally large logistical and mental strain on the generation charged with taking care of them.

The good news: Tech can help. There are devices that monitor elder health 24/7 and alert you when there's a problem. And apps that make sure someone's always available to drive dad to the doctor. And even seniorfriendly interactive robots. Yes, they're a thing now.

Everything is already on the market, with the goal of helping our parents live fuller, more independent lives-and better yet, to give us at least some relief from worry.



Tech products specifically geared to seniors are usually modified for eyes that aren't as sharp or hands that aren't as steady as they used to be. They can give you and your parents greater peace of mind.



### GREATCALL INTELY MOBILE

If you want one-button access to GreatCall health and safety services without a smartphone, this 2 x 1.5-inch gadget is the be wom on a lanyard around the neck or ticket. Designed clipped to a belt, the Lively Mobile features a single button that instantly connects to a highly trained live operator. The built-in accelerometer measures motion so it can detect if its wearer falls and call an operator outcomstically; an internal GPS provides the location in case emergency responders need to be summoned.

COST \$50 for the unit, plus \$20 to \$ a month for service Greatcall.com



to \$35 more monthly.

Greatcall.com



#### GRANDPAD

Tech created specifically for seniors is often either too confusing or too limited, but the grandPad gets it right. This 8-inch tablet features large, clearly labeled icons for video and voice calls, photos, email, music, games, news, weather and search. Only people on the approved contacts list can send messages—meaning no worries about strangers or scammers bothering your folks. Best of all, there's a live support person on call 24/7 in English, Spanish and Chinese to help them troubleshoot (so you don't have to try).

#### COST

After a 30-day free trial, from \$49 a month, which includes the tablet and a 4G wireless connection.

Getgrandpad.com

#### UNALIWEAR KANEGA WATCH

It's entirely voice-driven: no tiny screen to squint at or pin-sized buttons to press. The Kanega can remind seniors to take their medications, guide them back home if they become lost on a walk and contact emergency services if they fall. Unlike most smartwatches from companies like Apple and Samsung, the Kanega doesn't require a smartphone.

\$50 activation fee, than \$50 a month for watch, cellular plan and 24/7 modical monitoring.

## **GREATCALL JITTERBUG SMART**

This smartphone differs from your average Android handset in a few senior-friendly ways. The homescreen is simpler, with large fonts and icons that make it easier to call, text, take pictures and play games. Optional health and safety services turn the phone into a lifeline. The 5Star app lets seniors tap a single button to talk to a highly trained live operator, who can determine if they need emergency assistance. Urgent Care connects them to medical pros 24/7, and MedCoach reminds them to take their medications.

# >>> BRAVE NEW WORLD

Getting mom and dad a smartphone or tablet doesn't do anyone much good if they don't know how to use it. If you lack the time or patience to teach the basics and can't recruit grandkids to do it, consider signing them up for classes.

AARP TEK
Workshops (aarp
.org/learnat50plus)
cover everything from
operating a smartphone
to online safety in
60- to 90-minute
classes. Workshops are
offered in 34 markets
nationwide, says Jean
Setzfand, senior VP of
programs. Best of all,
they're free to any senior,
whether or not they're
AARP members.

Local organizations, like Older Adults
Technology
Services (OATS) in New
York City and Senior
Surf in San Francisco,
offer tech classes. Using
Google to search is the
easiest way to find one in
your area.

The Oasis Institute (oasisnet.org/connections) offers classes in 30 cities and recently launched a YouTube channel to teach adults a range of tech skills, from navigating Facebook to mastering Excel. Individual classes start at around \$30, say Amy VanDeVelde, National Technology Program manager.

If your parents need tech help and can't find a class nearby, try the local library or senior center, suggests VanDeVelde. "Public libraries and senior centers offering tech classes are the nation's help desk," she says. "These professionals provide a wealth of knowledge to keep seniors connected."