

Podcast Transcript

Best Device for Seniors to Access the Web

Barry: Welcome to Senior Care Corner. I'm Barry.

Kathy: And I'm Kathy.

Barry: Today we've got another great episode for you. In our feature segment we're going to talk about the BEST device with which seniors can interact with the web and social media. We're going to have some news items and a quick tip for you.

As always, you can find us online at SeniorCareCorner.com with solutions and information for families and others who care for and about senior adults.

As we're recording this we're in the heat of summer and we hope everybody goes back and takes a look at our prior post talking about how to deal with it but we do want to give a reminder that if you have loved ones, whether they be seniors or anybody else at risk from the heat to check on them or to call and make sure that somebody else checks on them, just to make sure.

Alright Kathy, what do you have for us today for news items?

Kathy: Okay Barry I've got several interesting items to let everyone know about. The first item talks about:

Healthier Lifestyles Could cut Alzheimer's cases by 30,000 People

American researchers recently published a report in Lancet Neurology stating that there are seven lifestyle factors whose improvement could result in a reduction of 25% worldwide in Alzheimer's cases which is an equivalent of 3 million people.

The seven factors include:

- Physical inactivity
- Diabetes
- Smoking
- Mid-life obesity
- High blood pressure
- Depression
- Poor education

Researchers feel that if people lead a more healthy lifestyle that they could avoid Alzheimer's disease.

We have heard the things we should do to be more healthy, now there is some evidence that it can actually change our risk for Alzheimer's disease.

Barry: So I guess Kathy is that something more valuable to younger people to work now to avoid it, or is it something that you think is actionable for seniors?

Kathy: It's certainly something that we want to think about as young adults but definitely we can see improvements with seniors and all these boomers coming into the age of 65. They really can be helped if they make these little changes in their lifestyles.

Barry: Well even one less case of Alzheimer's is an improvement so hopefully we can do something.

Kathy: That's true. Alright, our second news item:

Brain Shrinkage: It's only in Humans

We might have guessed it, but the human brain has been shown to shrink as we age. A new study shows that it seems to be true for us but not for our closest relatives-the primates.

Our brains can shrink by as much as 15%. Brain shrinkage has been connected to dementia, memory loss and even depression.

Neuroscientists had thought that all species experienced the same changes, but it appears that humans have an unusual late life biology in the frontal lobe of the brain.

The human brain weighs about 3 pounds.

As the global population ages, evolutionary biology has become a public health focus.

Researchers believe that understanding the biology of the brain more fully will help them devise ways to treat its harmful effects such as those that contribute to Alzheimer's disease.

Barry: Interesting.

Kathy: Alright, in our next news item:

The Center for Technology and Aging has awarded grants in total of \$477,150 to five organizations who will implement mobile health technologies for older adults suffering from chronic health conditions.

The award winners included:

1. Caloptima- preventing delays in the transition of Medicare beneficiaries with heart disease using wireless tools for mobile health.
2. Family Services of San Francisco- they're using cloud based electronic health records with a table with a touchscreen for use with frail, isolated and low income seniors to assess and coordinate their care.
3. Front Porch Center for Technology Innovation and Wellbeing-they're using medication adherence apps for cell phones for independent seniors.
4. Health Insight-a mobile health for diabetes education and care for seniors company.
5. Sharp Healthcare Foundation-who manages chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (what we know as COPD) with remote monitoring in seniors.

The goal of the awards is to improve effective approaches to a variety of settings and diseases to improve healthcare and lower the costs of services for our seniors.

Barry: Well in this time of many concerns about the amount of money the US government is spending, I'd say at least personally, that's money well spent. And I think a good example for other projects.

Kathy: Exactly. These companies are role models in the industry and hopefully they'll be innovators and models for other companies who want to get on board with this mobile health.

Alright, our final news item today is:

Sun Exposure Risks your senior's Medications

Everyone enjoys the summer sun but if your senior gets drug induced sun sensitivity their skin could be damaged.

Drug induced sun sensitivity is called phototoxicity. The sun's UV rays interact with medications your senior may take to cause what is usually an immediate skin reaction.

Some medications that can cause problems include:

- NSAIDs such as ibuprofen and naproxen
- Antibiotics such as tetracycline and others
- Statin drugs for lowering cholesterol
- Blood pressure pills, blood sugar pills excuse me, such as glipizide and glyburide
- Diuretics like Lasix and hydrochlorothiazide (HCTZ)

You can help protect your senior by limiting sun exposure and avoid going in the sun during the peak times from 10 am to 3 pm.

Your senior should wear a hat with a brim, long sleeves and always use sunscreen which should be reapplied every 2 hours.

Be sure your sunscreen is not too old to be effective and replace them every season just to be safe.

If you have any questions about the medications your senior takes, please be sure to ask your doctor or pharmacist so you'll know which ones may be harmful and whether or not you should take more precautions.

Barry: Well that's a great news item Kathy, matter of fact that could even be a quick tip. I guess we're getting a double dose of quick tips today.

Kathy: Okay!

Barry: Laughs. Well now it's time for our feature segment. And in response to a lot of the feedback we've been getting and some questions on some prior blog posts. We thought that we'd take a look at the various technologies out there for seniors, and anybody in general really, as far as accessing the web and social media and come up with which one is best.

Well absent a drum roll here, want to tell you that yes, I'll admit that is a tease. The headline is a tease and the lead in as well, because not surprisingly, we don't feel that one single device or

even type of device is right for everyone. It really depends on the needs and the capability of each individual.

And when it comes right down to it, there are many criteria. In fact, as we were talking about this episode we realize that this is a good place for a checklist or even some sort of flow chart to help people decide and when we get ambitious over the next few weeks, we'll go ahead and put one together.

But for now we want to talk through some of the criteria and let you know that we're not going to recommend any specific devices at this point. Although we reserve the right to make recommendations and even promote devices at some point in the future when we feel comfortable that some are simply outstanding and provide the right sort of service for seniors and their caregivers.

Jumping in on the criteria, we really want to talk first about those factors that are not specifically related to the user but really how the device is going to be used. Here I want to caution you when you're thinking about how your senior is going to be using a device to access the web or access social media; don't just think about how they are going to use it today when they are starting out. But how someone might want to use the device once they gain some comfort with it and get a little more ambitious about venturing out onto the web.

Now we certainly don't want to encourage anyone to overspend on features and especially complexity that's not needed right now. But upgrading because the initial device doesn't meet the needs a few months down the road can be a very expensive proposition and it's something with a little foresight maybe you can avoid. But you look at the different features and you compare them to the devices that are out there. I mean, is the device going to be used simply for text messaging, which could send you to potentially the direction of just a cell phone. Or will there be email use? Will your elder loved one be viewing web pages such as looking at banking or other financial sites, or doing some online shopping, or simply surfing the web? Will they be interacting with social media sites? I mean one of the things that we really want to see seniors do is get into Facebook, maybe interact with Twitter, and yes the up and comer now is Google +. It's too soon to see if that's going to be an every person vehicle. But certainly social media is out there and as we've discussed in a prior blog post we really do think that becoming social in those sites is something that is helpful for seniors AND their caregivers; link everybody together.

Now beyond those functions, we start looking at some of the more traditional computer functions. Is this device going to be used to create or edit documents? Editing pictures that might be taken? Or taking a camera and thumbing through pictures deciding which to send on which to post on social media?

Kathy: Well also I think there are probably a lot of seniors out there, and we have done a blog post on this, is reminiscing about their life, letting their children know about some of the things in their family history; and they could create photo albums online and they could do kind of an autobiography of their life and their family's life throughout the generations, that might be interesting use of media.

Barry: Yeah, in fact in a recent blog post, as Kathy mentioned, we talked about some scrapbooking applications that may be found very useful on the computer. In addition to those

simple things as far as putting together a scrapbook, I think as we mentioned in the blog post that sort of thing can stimulate the brain and really help people stay younger.

Another set of criteria in choosing the right device focus on where the device is going to be used. I mean, is your senior loved one aging in place in their own home or maybe with another family member? Is the device going to be used in another sort of facility, maybe an assisted living facility, a nursing home, or even while traveling? Those types of things come into what type of device is needed.

Certainly if it's going to be used at home, there's a full range of devices available. If it's going to be used in another facility, you may want to look at the limitations of that facility. If your loved one is living in a nursing home, will the device be used simply in their room or will they take it with them to the day room or outside when they are socializing with others? Certainly want to think about, yeah one set of criteria may push you toward giving them a desktop computer. That works, and with a small profiles they have today they are very useful but if they want to take out and show their friends pictures of their grandchildren and their children, then that doesn't lend itself as well.

And certainly, if someone wants to take it with them traveling, as so many seniors seem to do, even more so than those of us that are younger do; then you certainly want to have a device that is capable of traveling, which may speak to multiple devices.

Another thing to look at especially since we're talking about connecting to the internet is the type or types of connections to the internet that might be available for your loved one. I mean, are we talking about dial-up? In this day and age I would venture that almost nobody listening to this podcast is on dial-up, but there may be some. And there certainly are a number of people out there still on dial-up because they haven't seen a need or possibly can't even afford high speed internet access. So certainly don't want to forget that, and that will play a role in what kind of device they need.

Now, some people have wired high speed internet. And that means that they actually plug something into their computer and into an outlet in the wall or somewhere else in their room or in the facility so that they can use the internet.

Most common probably in a lot of nursing homes is a wireless local area network or a wireless LAN, as it's called, wireless internet. A lot of facilities now and probably most even, are providing wireless internet there for guests and residents to be able to use that. And we'll talk about some pluses and minuses of that in a few minutes.

Kathy, I think what you've seen; virtually all facilities are offering some sort of access now.

Kathy: Right, I think that we have to think about really the broader picture, it didn't originate with then need to give a resident access to wireless communications, but it did for the physician. So a lot of facilities have installed those types of networks in their facilities in order to have the doctors have access to the medical records that are now primarily electronic. So it's kind of been a byproduct of meeting the needs of physicians that now, residents have this ability to connect wirelessly.

Barry: One more method that certainly shouldn't be overlooked because it is very common is accessing the internet via the service provided by the cell phone company, the mobile internet. And depending on the type of device you use, that may be the preferred method, or even the only one available in some cases.

So really, it's up to you on what's available to you, what the cost is, and we'll talk about some other features here but sometimes it may go with the specific feature you're looking at. For example, if you want to travel and you're looking at other uses, you may decide to use a smartphone. In which case, you'll certainly want to get the cell phone company's mobile wireless because that's a bulk of what you'd use while traveling. Although a lot of people don't get that at all and simply use wireless internet, be it a "hot spot" at the local McDonald's or Starbucks, or actually so many places now have them; or as we mentioned earlier using the wireless internet in the nursing home or other facility where they are living.

Kathy: So they could also access it in the airport or in the hotel room when they travel?

Barry: Yeah, certainly. Now we'll talk about the security concerns with that in a few minutes. But that is one option out there that makes the smartphone a very flexible device; and I'll say right now and we'll talk about more in a minute, for those that can use them!

Because there are many other criteria, aside from the capabilities of the devices and the systems; I mean realistically we have to look at those criteria related to the senior, or any other person who will be using the device. And really among those we are talking about some individual capabilities, some of them, even most of them when we sit down and think about it become fairly obvious. But it's the obvious things that we often overlook when we're making decisions, so we might want to walk through some of those.

Kathy: I would hate to buy something and then find out that for whatever reason it can't be used. That would be a shame.

Barry: I mean we're talking about the smartphones a minute ago, and you think about "yeah, they're great devices and so many people have them now". I think more than half of the cell phones in the country now are smartphones. However, there are limitations associated with those.

Some of those limitations are; you look at vision. How big does the device that you're senior's going to use have to be for them to be comfortable using it? Remember if they're not comfortable, they are going to be less likely to use it. And may even put it aside and not use it at all. And then you spent money on nothing and they haven't gained the benefits. So are they able to readily see it? And that comes down to a lot of us too; can you see the screen with or without your glasses?

Another big factor with smartphones and even keyboards is dexterity. How big a keyboard is needed to type comfortably; if a keyboard can be used at all? And that's really something to think about there. Can your loved one use a keyboard? I mean, not everybody is capable of it. Certainly a lot of people can use a standard computer sized keyboard but not a lot of us; heck fat fingered me has trouble with a keyboard on as smartphone.

Kathy: Well, not only fat fingers, I've seen you try to use it; but also arthritic hands. What if your loved one's fingers are quite arthritic and actually gnarled, in some instances, they may not have the dexterity and mobility in their fingers to actually text on a smartphone.

Barry: And another aspect with devices is memory. And I'm not talking about the memory that the device holds, but the memory of the person that's going to be using it. Are they likely to frequently forget where they used the device last and where they put it down, particularly of course if it's portable? You know all of us do that at times, but some people are more prone to being forgetful than others. It's something especially for someone who's living in a nursing home; they may put it down in one room and they don't come back to that room for days. They are without their device. So if you have somebody who is forgetful like that, you may want to focus on a device that's big enough to be noticed if they have left it behind or even something that's really tied to a location so that they can't take it somewhere readily and use it. Or at least they'll remember having it when they do, because it will be noticeable when they leave without it.

Another factor to consider that is individual related is their interest in using the device. Somebody who isn't initially interested in using the device, whether it's a smartphone, a computer or even a tablet may not put as much effort into it and thus may take longer or even resist it. And again, we want to get them to use these devices to communicate with others, to interact with the world. If we can't get them to do it because they don't want to, they're not going to benefit from it.

One thing that we don't think about a lot is access to local assistance or in computer lingo, support. I mean, if we get a device that somebody can't use for whatever reason, the benefits aren't going to be there. And they may not decide to use it again once it's even fixed. I mean you look at it; most devices need updating, new versions of software, new operating systems, even for smartphones. Printers need paper and ink refills. And let's face it, I think with every computing device we've seen; things just go wrong!

Kathy: And if you're a senior and you get frustrated with a device that's supposed to be helping you connect with your loved ones; you may not want to use it again. One or two tries, when you can't get the printer to print. It could be really frustrating and really stop them in their tracks. And if you're talking about memory, what if they forget to plug it in? Then it won't be used. What if they forget the password to put into it to get it to start? That could be very frustrating.

Barry: And those are things that are not reasons to avoid it so much but considerations when deciding on the device and really steps to take once you get your senior working on the device. And it might even be; especially with a password, or something else; that you will want to have a copy of and let somebody more readily accessible to your loved one do it. I mean, with support or helping them with their device. Yes if they are living in your home or in another loved one's home or have a full time caregiver; that's information that can be left with the caregiver. Otherwise you may want to consider how they will receive support if the printer needs paper or if they have a device that goes bad, you may want to have a resource near THEM that they can take it to or somebody who can stop in and help them if something goes wrong.

Kathy: Like a grandchild?

Barry: Laughs. Yes, like a grandchild now. Yes, well we joke about that all the time, grandchildren showing you how to use devices. I mean, face it, grandchildren and I recognize many of those listening to this, grew up with computers from day one.

Now, WE didn't grow up with computers from day one, but we grew up with personal computers from the beginning, I'll say that, I won't speak to Kathy. But I just realized when putting this together that I've been using personal computers for over 30 years. And that's intimidating.

Kathy: But you still got a call from your father to help you plug in the printer.

Barry: Not only my father, but my daughter calls for help. So that makes me feel good sometimes too.

Well we want to bring it all together for you here what we talked about. And really, you look at the different things we've discussed, I mean the more traditional computer applications that will be used by your loved one, the more likely it is a full-fledged computer is your more likely alternative. And then you look at a mobile laptop or a fixed location desktop is best based on other factors including cost.

And there the type of internet access that you have available isn't an issue because you can use any type of internet access with those, even the cellular companies provide interfaces to their system if that's the only access that's available.

And there we were talking full-fledged computers, we want to point out that many people, ourselves included are using the new tablet computers and finding that they provide many of the functions that traditional personal computers provide. And I think if you go there you'll see a number of studies showing that seniors with reduced dexterity have a much easier time using tablet computers than others. Plus it's simply fun, you can simply touch something and it's selected or move things around. And it's sometimes a much more enjoyable interface.

Now if there are visual or dexterity issues, it might tend to point you toward devices with larger screens as well. And again, they may be the touch based tablet computers, or there are some devices out there now developed specifically for seniors that have very large screens and a computer built in and they do have touch capabilities.

We've talked about some of those before and rather than risk leaving out some because the market has changed so quickly, we will report on those in the near future. So we really don't want to get into any of them now. In fact we might have some of those folks on future podcasts talking to you about them.

As you can see, we could go on and on; and I also have here really. Like I said, this is ripe for a checklist of a flow chart and we're going to go ahead and put something together in the future. And I wouldn't be surprised if we hear from you the ubiquitous "there's an app for that" out there already.

One thing we want to say before we close on this topic is don't overlook privacy and security! Now, even though many nursing homes, other facilities, restaurants, airports and everything are providing wireless internet access, you know please please please don't count on that for access

any site that requires a password or other information such as credit card numbers, UNLESS you are very comfortable with security features in the system and your selected device.

When it comes to the nursing home, as Kathy mentioned, they put in their systems for the physicians, so hopefully there is security in place and you can use it for that. I mean heck if it's being used for your medical records, hopefully you can use it for your banking as well! But don't assume that; go to the people in charge of that. Even if you have to; somebody at the facility will know how to access that and how to access it securely. Help your loved one do that, and again hold onto their password.

Now wired internet is safer. I think a lot of new facilities are being built with that capability but the vast majority of them don't have that in there. They don't have it rewired so what you're going to find is wireless internet.

Now one thing to think about, if you're concerned about the security of the wireless and there isn't wired internet; you may find it safer, though typically more expensive to use devices using a cell phone company's mobile web. Whether it's a smartphone, a tablet computer that that company provides, or even a regular stand-alone desktop or personal computer with their internet access capability there; a lot of them provide a card or even just a little USB plug-in that can access their cellular system at a price.

But there's a lot out there and I mean if we've missed something and any of you have suggestions, please leave us a comment or shoot us a note. I guess that's it for this, I guess Kathy; you've got a quick tip, a second quick tip for the day?

Kathy: Well, this one goes back to what you started off the podcast with today and that's concern about the heat.

We have all experienced the extreme and for some people prolonged heat this summer. Many of our seniors refuse to turn on the air conditioner but this could really kill them. 400 people die in the US, mostly seniors, from extreme heat.

What can you do as a caregiver to help?

- 1.) Offer to pay the electric bill that month. Maybe that will get them to turn the air conditioner on.
- 2.) Take your senior somewhere cool during the hottest part of the day like the library, the grocery store, or a shopping center.
- 3.) Keep them well hydrated with a variety of different fluids.
- 4.) Be sure they have properly fitting, clean lightweight clothes for the summer heat.
- 5.) Encourage a cool shower, a bite from a cool fruit or a Popsicle to help beat the heat.

Barry: Thank you Kathy, that's a great tip. Well as we wrap up here for this episode, we want to talk about a couple of things real quick. Certainly if you have any thoughts or comments to leave us, or any feedback at all, come out to SeniorCareCorner.com and leave a comment or contact us through the Contact page on the site.

We're particularly interested if you have any suggestions or want to recommend somebody for a guest on a future episode of a podcast. We are looking for people who can talk about

technologies, who can talk about issues or even families or caregivers who have stories they want to share that can benefit others. So whether it's you, somebody you know or something; come to the site, leave us a comment, contact us through the page or leave something on the Facebook page for us.

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