

## Podcast Transcript: Holiday Tech Gifts for Seniors 2012

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

**Kathy:** And I'm Kathy. Thanks for joining us today!

**Barry:** You'll find us online at SeniorCareCorner.com with solutions, tools and information for families and other caregivers of senior adults.

Well Kathy we've got another great episode here today and time sure has flown through the year. We're all the way back to Holiday gift giving again. Just in time for that, we're going to have a discussion of holiday tech gifts that we can consider for our senior loved ones. Before we get to that though Kathy, I believe you have some news items for us?

**Kathy:** I do as always. Our first news item today:

### **Doctor's Don't Always Address High Blood Pressure**

A new study reports that doctors sometimes miss the opportunity to help their patients' better control high bold pressure.

Of 7,153 people who had uncontrolled high blood pressure participating in the survey, only 20% were prescribed new medications during a doctor visit.

High blood pressure is defined as a reading of 140/90 or higher. Uncontrolled high blood pressure is linked to heart attack, stroke and aneurysms. In the US, about 1 in 3 adults has high blood pressure.

Researchers are not placing blame on doctors, but instead encourage doctors to grab the moments at hand and take the opportunity to make necessary changes to control blood pressure.

National guidelines are to provide people with uncontrolled blood pressure medication and those already on medication with new medications if the condition worsens.

Between 2005 and 2009, 16,473 doctor visits were recorded for patients already diagnosed with high blood pressure.

More than 7,000 of these patients still had blood pressure that was too high with only 20% being prescribed a new medication regimen. Those already on blood pressure medication were less likely to get a new one. It was unclear whether some medication dosages were changed instead of getting a new prescription however.

Researchers stress the importance for adults to bring up their blood pressure with their doctor to remind them that changes may be required for better control.

**Barry:** Good point there; starting us off with a little scientific twist, huh?

**Kathy:** That's right. Our next news item:

### **Diabetes and Alzheimer's Linked**

**The Mayo Clinic reports that diabetes may increase your risk of Alzheimer's. Reduce this risk by controlling your blood sugar. Diet and exercise can help too.**

The exact link between diabetes and Alzheimer's is not yet clear but the connection has been identified in studies. Those with Type 2 diabetes are at a higher risk of developing Alzheimer's disease.

Preventing or controlling diabetes may reduce the risk of Alzheimer's.

Diabetes damages blood vessels and has been thought to therefore be a risk for vascular dementia. Ongoing research is looking for the link between Type 2 diabetes and Alzheimer's. There is also thought to be a concern for the potential for diabetes to increase risk for development of mild cognitive impairment. Learning more about how this occurs may reveal ways to not only avoid Alzheimer's as a complication of diabetes but also a new way to treat Alzheimer's.

The recommendations for us is to work with our healthcare providers to prevent diabetes firstly and then control it once diagnosed in order to prevent complications such as Alzheimer's and other cognitive impairment.

Tips to help prevent diabetes complications include losing 7% of your excess body weight and exercising for 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week.

**Barry:** You keep finding benefits to additional exercise don't you?

**Kathy:** Absolutely, we've got to get moving. Alright, our next news item:

### **Veterans in Rural Areas to Get Expanded Access to Health Care**

The Department of Health and Human Services Secretary and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs announced a joint effort recently to expand health care delivery to veterans living in rural areas.

This new agreement promotes improved collaboration between VA facilities and private hospitals and clinics. It is planned to be supported with \$983,100 in grants for access and care coordination throughout tele-health.

Our goal is to provide rural veterans care they need closer to home. Virginia, Montana and Alaska have the highest density of veterans and will receive \$300,000 each to improve access.

The grants will provide tele-health equipment and electronic health records that will be compatible with the current VA systems.

This partnership is expected to improve the quality of life for rural veterans and yield a potential capacity of 1.2 million tele-health consultations each year once implemented.

**Barry:** Oh very interesting. And we'll look forward to that.

**Kathy:** It's a great innovation. Alright, our next news item:

### **Magic Carpet could Help Shield Elderly from Falls**

Researchers report that seniors can use plastic optical fibers in carpeting to warn them when their walking patterns might put them at risk for fall.

These fibers are placed on a carpet underlay. They sense a senior's movement throughout electronics and send a signal to a computer where they can be analyzed.

Researchers from the University of Manchester in the United Kingdom say that the hope is that these optical fibers will be used in carpets in nursing homes, hospitals and private homes.

Not only do seniors benefit from exercises that improve balance and muscle strength but being able to identify changes in a senior's walking pattern and gait in their own environment could help identify problems and put safeguards into motion.

The research should be viewed as preliminary Barry, but this is a very interesting innovation and could lead to improved efforts in fall prevention especially for those seniors who are aging in place.

**Barry:** Well now we're even talking about smart rugs. That's interesting.

**Kathy:** It sure is. Our final news item today, Barry:

### **Tiny Telescope Implant Helps Aging Eyes See**

There is a new type of procedure being done at the University of California that restores some vision to those with end-stage age-related macular degeneration.

Macular degeneration is the leading cause of blindness in the elderly. It creates a blind spot in the person's central field of vision. Doctors used a telescopic implant that projects images onto the undamaged portion of the retina so that the person can see objects directly in front of them again.

Doctors say that after an implant, the brain gets retrained to see so that the vision is improved over time.

So far the implanted telescope has been received by 50 individuals. Eligible candidates are 75 years or older who have stable but untreatable end-stage, age-related macular degeneration.

Barry, we'll learn of more potential candidates and success stories with this new procedure in the future I am sure considering the number of seniors this vision loss.

**Barry:** Definitely. You know, what such a positive there is to me, in addition to the improvement in sight, is that they are actually coming up with medical procedures to improve the lives for those over 75. Previously, you think that once people got that old there was a lot of talk; they really weren't worth investing a lot of money into because they weren't going to live that much longer. That's good news.

**Kathy:** That's an interesting point Barry, because remember centenarians are a fast growing population at this point in time.

**Barry:** Definitely! Well thanks Kathy; those were some great news items. Managed to come up with some new twists and things we hadn't heard before. And now it's time to move onto our feature segment.

It's been a while, Kathy, since we talked about technology – well, at least the everyday, at-home technology. And with so many of us starting to think about what to give senior loved ones for the upcoming holiday season, you know that impossible task that we face each year; it's probably a good time to look at what's out there that might solve problems they have or otherwise meet their needs - - even if they don't realize they have those needs.

There have been a number of changes in technology and how it's made available that can make it more practical for those considering gifts for senior loved ones - - not to mention making it a gift that's more likely to be used by them because it does something THEY want, again even if they don't realize they want it until they see what it does for them.

**Kathy:** That's really important, Barry. We've seen so many things that were great gifts but such surprises when given because the recipients didn't understand why they were getting them or the benefits they could get. I know I've been given tech gifts in the past that I didn't think I would use at first but now can't live without. With some of the ideas we're going to discuss, gift givers will have to be ready for uncertain responses from their loved ones when they open them.

**Barry:** And that's where it's going to end too, Kathy, with some of these gifts unless the giver takes it one or two steps beyond wrapping the package and handing it over. With many of the things we'll discuss, set up and maybe even demonstration needs to be considered part of the gift. And that's something to keep in mind when listening here. Otherwise many of these COULD go unused and our hopes for the benefits to senior family members will be lost. Even worse, with a gift for which they see no purpose, THEY may feel like it was money wasted and then feel bad that we spent money needlessly. We've all been through that before!

Some of the gifts we're going to discuss will be obvious, but with different angles than might have been considered in the past or new features that might make them a better gift for specific loved ones than in the past.

**Kathy:** Not only that Barry, but sometimes the things we think are obvious gifts are not to others or are not something older family members will buy for themselves. Pushing obvious ideas to the side may deprive our loved ones of some of the greatest benefits.

**Barry:** Great point, Kathy. Thanks. It's always a good reminder that the important perspective is that of the one for whom we are getting the gift. Remember too that seniors, like the rest of us, are individuals. There is often discussion of them and well really any age group as if it's made up of a bunch of people who think and buy alike. Of course, nothing could be further from the truth. Sure, there may be some commonality, but don't assume that products advertised for seniors are something needed, or even that will benefit everyone who is a senior - - and especially don't assume it is right for the senior for whom you're getting a gift.

Well, enough of a lead-in; let's talk tech!

First on our list is smartphones.

**Kathy:** Talk about one of the obvious items!

**Barry:** Maybe so; but maybe for the wrong reason. Yes, more seniors are getting smartphones, but a recent report from Pew Research indicates that only 11% of seniors own smartphones.

**Kathy:** But don't many people say seniors don't want or need smartphones, Barry, including many seniors?

**Barry:** Well that's exactly what makes them a good first item for our list, Kathy. If many people think about it, they may realize that a smartphone is something their senior loved one wants but doesn't know it - - and maybe even needs.

**Kathy:** I hear a number of people say they see no need for it or it doesn't work for them because the screen's so small or they can't type on something that small - - not to mention those who say the carriers' data plans are just too expensive for what they will get out of it.

**Barry:** I've heard the same, Kathy, and that should all be considered from the standpoint of the person for whom we're getting the gift. There are recent changes that address some of the concerns and others can be addressed with a little homework on our part.

There are now smartphones, as you've seen, with bigger screens and higher definition in those screens, so that most people who can read a book can work with the smartphone and its screen. They are not as big as a standard keyboard, of course, but the bigger screens do allow for bigger keyboards, which should be functional for more people. I'm one of those who didn't see myself typing on a screen keyboard but have found it to be very workable and am able to type long emails and even small documents more quickly than firing up my computer just to do that.

**Kathy:** I've found a number of apps don't require much typing, especially some of the apps we've seen available or under development for seniors. Many allow for touch selections, with icons or menus that allow key functions to be completed.

**Barry:** So true Kathy. Overall, with larger sizes, new apps and updated operating systems, smartphones are much more usable for more people than even a year ago. Of course, many will say they it's still a phone and they see no need for more than a basic cell phone. That's where explanation, and maybe some "show-me" from us is needed to demonstrate that smartphones are SO much more than just phones - - and that MORE includes many things that could benefit our senior loved ones.

Smartphones are now as good a digital camera or video camera as many of us will ever need.

**Kathy:** Not only that, but larger screen on the smartphone can make it easier to see the subject of the picture to make sure you've got the shot set up right and then preview the picture afterward to make sure you got what you wanted – and that nobody had their eyes closed or got distracted at the last second. It is easy to overlook that aspect of a smartphone. That screen is also big enough that I find myself using my phone for reading kindle books, so now I have my books wherever I go.

**Barry:** Also much easier is transferring pictures to where you'll use them or sending them to a social media account or to others via email. Smartphones now link directly to the cloud, which is a buzz word now, but it simply means they can be accessed by any of your Internet connected devices, such as computers, tablets or other items we'll discuss in a few minutes, all without the need for cables or the other equipment that we might have used in the past.

In addition to eliminating the need for a separate camera, a smartphone can also can fill the role of GPS device for directions when driving or walking, replace the phone directories we might have used, especially the yellow pages, and fill in for several other items with which many people grew up.

**Kathy:** There are also important functions smartphones can fill for many seniors that family caregivers may find especially important. There are apps that provide medication reminders, which can be particularly handy for those taking multiple items at different times of the day. Of course, doctors and other appointments can be stored, along with directions to each if needed. Smartphones are also a great way to carry medical information, including lists of all the medications one is taking so that each healthcare provider knows and can avoid prescribing anything that would result in adverse impacts. There are many more ways seniors in particular can benefit from apps, both available now and those to come. You might be surprised what you'll find if you look through the lists of those that are available with each person's needs in mind.

**Barry:** So true, thank you Kathy. - - - While I think we could go on all day about smartphones, and may do an episode just with those in mind at some point, we need to move on to other tech items that might make great gifts this holiday season.

Before we do move on, though, I want to touch on one more item that has held some back from considering smartphones, you brought it up earlier, the cost of the data plan. Some of the cell companies, in an effort to make more from those who use massive amounts of cellular data with their devices, have actually made it more affordable for those seniors---and the rest of us---who might only use small amounts of data. While plans for small users have gotten cheaper, you might find the shared data plans are tailor made for this situation. By putting your senior loved one on your family's shared data plan you might find you can meet their needs at a much lower cost than they could get on their own.

Okay, now we're REALLY moving on...

Next let's talk about tablets, but only briefly, since they are so well publicized today. While Pew's latest survey reflects only 13% of seniors now owning tablets, it's a number that seems to be growing pretty quickly.

**Kathy:** It's easy to see why more seniors are getting tablets. Besides getting many of the benefits of smartphones on a screen - and with that an on screen keyboard - that can be MUCH bigger, including the use of apps and even cameras, the larger size of the tablet screen makes them much more convenient for reading eBooks.

**Barry:** And of course, that's the application for which some of the tablets were initially designed.

**Kathy:** That's right, Barry. One thing that's really nice is that you can use most tablets to read your eBooks, regardless of where you got them, which makes them very flexible. While a tablet isn't a phone, with Wi-Fi or a data connection you CAN use them to make phone calls via Skype, which many people are doing to keep in touch these days. Tablets can also be used to conveniently play games like mahjong when on the go or at home.

**Barry:** Well, one thing tablets have in common with smartphones as gifts are some extra effort that might be needed to make sure they're truly useful gifts that are appreciated. In addition to considering up front how your senior loved one might make use of the device and what needs it could help meet, a little time spent setting it up can make the benefits much more evident right away to the recipient. That can help avoid frustration, of course, but making the device valuable to the senior right from the start will make it more likely they'll want to keep on using it when you're not around.

With the ease of use we find in our touchscreen smartphones and tablets, it seems only natural that being able to do the same thing on a larger screen, one that can be used for more applications right in the home, would be great as well.

**Kathy:** Yeah, I see the way you look at those large touchscreens on some of the TV shows...

**Barry:** Well, it DOES look very convenient and ok, maybe just a little bit fun too. Even more important, though, is that we have heard a number of family members say their senior loved ones would really like a touchscreen because they aren't comfortable with a keyboard or have arthritic hands that just can't manage the typing. Until now, the touchscreen options have been very limited in computers, especially in the price range most of us can afford for our homes. With the introduction of Windows 8, that's all changing. We've had a chance to demo laptops and standalone monitors with touch screen capability built in to work with Windows 8. Got to say, we found them pretty impressive. I expect those touchscreens to be a hot item this holiday season, and with good reason.

**Kathy:** Barry, can someone get that capability just by upgrading their existing computer to Windows 8?

**Barry:** Afraid not, Kathy. That means a new computer will likely be needed. If your senior loved one has a computer that's out of date already, there may be other benefits to getting a new one. Even if not, hopefully the new models will be priced at a level that makes it easy to give the gift of touchscreen computing. And if prices don't work for you now, they're likely to drop quickly the way computer prices have for years now.

Okay, that's it for computing. Let's talk about some gifts you might not consider for aging family members.

**Kathy:** I would put a gaming console into that category. We've talked about these before, but there are more games and other applications being developed with the needs of seniors in mind and some areas where seniors can benefit right along with other age groups.

We are seeing new reports all the time that talk about the benefits to seniors of keeping physically and mentally active...

**Barry:** Well in fact you talked about that earlier in a news item, Kathy.

**Kathy:** And with good reason. Keeping physically active can help keep your body feeling younger and exercising your mind can help do the same for it. There are many games and other activities that make that exercise both productive and fun, some of which are specifically designed for the needs and limitations of older bodies. One benefit to the family caregiver is that most of the games can be used right out of the box, with little or no effort by family members needed to make them work for seniors who aren't tech savvy.

In addition to the competing with others at home, there are interactive functions with the game consoles that provide socialization benefits. Barry, I know in a few minutes you'll be sharing another way to make a game console valuable, one that many will overlook when evaluating potential gifts.

**Barry:** Yes I will Kathy. Before we get there, though, let's discuss another potential tech gift that might not quickly come to mind for senior loved ones - - a new television.

**Kathy:** We're talking more money now than other gifts, aren't we?

**Barry:** Maybe, but probably not as much as you might think, Kathy. While this might not be a gift for everyone, there are many seniors who could benefit from getting a TV that has a larger screen, one with more definition in the picture - - both of which can make TV more accessible to those with aging eyes and ears.

There's another reason to consider getting a new TV for a senior loved one, though, and that's because some of the new TVs offer so much more than just regular television programming. Internet-connected TVs, as the name implies, provide access to so much that is on the internet, including such things as family pictures and movies.

**Kathy:** We've seen for ourselves how nice it can be to see pictures and home movies on a screen much larger than our computer or other devices offer.

**Barry:** That we have, Kathy. Being connected to the internet opens the door to SO much more than a TV can offer as well, more than we can probably imagine today. This is something family members might want to investigate with the needs of senior loved ones in mind even if they don't plan to buy one for the seniors.

Earlier this year we talked about a report prepared by the Consumer Electronics Association covering ownership of tech devices and plans for future purchases. Respondents to the survey for that report indicated that almost two thirds of older adults anticipated buying new TV within three years, with most of those indicating they would purchase a high definition TV. Now while only a third indicated they would buy an internet enabled or smart TV, I think it's a pretty good number, as I suspect many simply don't foresee the benefits they could get if their TV is connected to the web, and thus wouldn't indicate a desire to purchase it.

**Kathy:** It does sound like something to consider, though it may be beyond the gift-giving budget of many people.

**Barry:** Yeah, that's true. I realize we've talked about a number of bigger-ticket gifts but not all beneficial tech do costs a lot. In fact, we're going to close this discussion with two gifts that are lower cost, probably less obvious but that also complement the others we've discussed, should senior loved ones either have those or be getting them from others.

The first of these gifts is something that's a great asset to making the others work - - wireless home internets or Wi-Fi. Broadband at home is the best way for many to connect to the internet, whether using a smartphone, table, computer, gaming console, TV - or one of many other devices available now or in the future, including several designed based on the needs of seniors

aging in place independently. Many of us got our initial broadband connection in the home and had to plug our devices into the broadband jack to make them work, just like the old style phone.

While many of us have Wi-Fi in our homes already, if your senior loved one doesn't, it provides a great gift opportunity that has a lower cost and is fairly easy for you to set up. We'll provide links to a few routers you might consider in our show notes. When setting up home Wi-Fi, we recommend the extra step of securing it with password access.

**Kathy:** You mean to keep the neighbors from using it?

**Barry:** Well not for that reason specifically, though keeping fewer users on it can keep it running faster, especially for TV or other large streaming applications that you might have. What password access DOES really is make it safer for use by those in the home and harder for those who might be snooping to pick up login passwords, such as for your bank websites, and other private information that we might send out from our devices to the web. Yes, it takes an extra step but I think it's more than worth the extra effort. You can store the password into your loved ones devices so they don't have to enter it each time but I'd also recommend that you have the password handy for those calls you might get when your loved one needs to reenter the password for some reason or when someone else is visiting them and they simply want to use the Wi-Fi for their own devices.

**Kathy:** Looks like we're running a little longer than usual on time, Barry, so we need to start wrapping it up.

**Barry:** Well I do have just one more thing on my list to cover, Kathy, so I'll jump right to that. I saved it for last because it's something that can be used on all the rest of the things that we talked about and this one is unique because it could even save your loved ones some money. I'm talking about getting them a Netflix subscription. No, I'm not talking about the "get your DVDs in the mail" Netflix subscription, but the one that lets you stream movies and TV shows from the internet right onto your TV, computer, table or even smartphone.

Netflix is inexpensive so is a great gift for many to give and it offers so many choices. How can it save them money you might ask? Well think about those who have access to basic channels over the air for regular programming but use cable or satellite TV so they can watch old movies and old TV shows. Sound like anyone you know? Well, if that's what they want then Netflix might be able to meet their needs for a fraction of the cost of cable or dish. Even for those who want to keep the broadcast stations on their feed, a Netflix subscription can save the bundle they might be spending on the premium movie channels right now. I know that could save us some money.

But even if your senior loved one doesn't have or plan to get an internet-connected TV, they might still be able to easily access Netflix. They make it very easy to do it. If they a DVD or Blu-ray player, TiVo or even a video game console that's connected to the internet chances are

good they could use them to stream Netflix programming to their TV. Again, it makes it very easy.

**Kathy:** That DOES sound like a great gift - - and a great way to close this holiday tech gift discussion.

**Barry:** Well, there are many more tech gift options, of course, and a list that grows all the time. I hope we've been able to plant some ideas for gifts that will be beneficial to and appreciated by the senior loved ones in your lives.

With that, Kathy, I guess it's time for you to wrap us up with your quick tip.

**Kathy:** Okay, here we go:

### **What is a Heart Healthy Diet?**

We just celebrated World Heart Day so let's review our heart healthy diet to focus on our senior's health.

Here are some specific tips for keeping your senior's diet heart healthy:

1. Eat plenty of plants in the form of fruits, vegetables and whole grains.
2. Select fat-free or low-fat cheese, milk and yogurt.
3. Choose proteins that are lean such as eggs, nuts, dried beans, lean meats and poultry without the skin.
4. Avoid saturated and Trans fats found in fried and processed foods, fatty meats and baked goodies.
5. Limit the choices you make that are high in cholesterol, salt and sugar.

Try making one change a day then one each meal to help improve your senior's heart health. Good luck!

**Barry:** Well thanks Kathy, that's a great quick tip. And that wraps us up for this episode of Senior Care Corner podcast folks. We hope you enjoyed it and we really appreciate you joining us here. Again, look us up online at [SeniorCareCorner.com](http://SeniorCareCorner.com) for more tips and information like this; of course, we're also on Facebook at Senior Care Corner and if you like some of the gift ideas we've talked about I know you can find some of them in the Senior Care Corner Bookstore. Just click on the box that's on the homepage and it'll take you right there.

Again, appreciate you joining us and until we see you next time, we hope you have a great day!