

How Technology Can Positively Affect A Senior's Mental Health

by Jennifer Bell

The golden years of life should be filled with happiness, connection, and the opportunity to explore new horizons. For seniors and their loved ones, technology has emerged as a valuable ally, enriching these years in ways we might not have imagined a few decades ago. In this article, we will delve into the transformative power of technology, focusing on three key aspects: long-distance connections, the health benefits it brings, and the power of lifelong learning. Each of these elements contributes to the mental well-being of seniors, making their journey through life's later stages not just manageable but truly enjoyable.

Long-Distance Connections: Bridging the Gap

One of the most remarkable aspects of technology is its ability to connect people, regardless of the physical distance that separates them. For seniors and their loved ones, this can be a game-changer. Here are some ways in which technology facilitates and enhances long-distance connections:

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Mission

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Video Calls and Virtual Visits: Platforms like Zoom, Skype, and FaceTime have made it easier than ever for seniors to see and interact with their loved ones, even if they are miles apart. These virtual visits provide a sense of closeness and reduce feelings of isolation.

Social Media and Online Communities: Seniors can join social media platforms and online communities that cater to their interests and hobbies. This allows them to connect with like-minded individuals, share experiences, and build friendships, fostering a sense of belonging.

Online Book Clubs and Forums: Seniors who enjoy reading and discussing literature can participate in online book clubs and discussion forums. These platforms allow them to engage in intellectual conversations and connect with fellow book enthusiasts from around the world.

Online Gaming: Gaming isn't just for the younger generation. Many seniors enjoy playing online games that challenge their minds and provide opportunities for social interaction. This can be a fun way to stay mentally active while connecting with others.

Virtual Support Groups: Seniors facing specific challenges or health conditions can benefit from virtual support groups. These online gatherings provide a platform for sharing experiences, advice, and emotional support with peers who may be going through similar situations.

Family Portals and Shared Calendars: Technology offers tools for families to stay organized and connected. Family portals and shared calendars help seniors and their loved ones coordinate activities, appointments, and important events, ensuring everyone stays in the loop.

The Health Benefits of Technology for Seniors

In addition to fostering connections, technology offers a range of health benefits for seniors. Let's delve into how these advancements can positively affect their mental health:

Mental Stimulation: Apps and games designed to challenge memory, problem-solving, and cognitive skills are readily available. These digital tools provide mental stimulation, helping seniors keep their minds sharp and engaged.

Telehealth Services: Telehealth has revolutionized healthcare accessibility for seniors. They can now consult with healthcare professionals and caregivers from the comfort of their homes, reducing the stress associated with travel and wait times. This accessibility promotes better mental health by addressing health concerns promptly.

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Medication Management: Many seniors rely on medications to manage their health. Technology has introduced medication reminder apps that ensure seniors take their prescriptions on time, reducing anxiety related to missed doses.

Health Monitoring Devices: Wearable technology, such as fitness trackers and smartwatches, allows seniors to monitor their health in real time. Tracking vital signs and activity levels provides a sense of control over their well-being, which can positively impact mental health.

Access to Information: The internet offers a wealth of information on health and wellness. Seniors can stay informed about their conditions, research treatment options, and find resources to support their mental health.

Virtual Reality Therapy: Emerging technologies like virtual reality (VR) are being used to treat conditions like anxiety and PTSD. VR therapy can transport seniors to calming and immersive environments, offering relief from stress and anxiety.

Lifelong Learning: Expanding Horizons Through Technology

One of the most remarkable aspects of technology is its capacity to support lifelong learning. Seniors who engage in continuous learning activities often experience improved mental health and a greater sense of purpose. Here's how technology enables seniors to embark on a lifelong learning journey:

Online Courses and Webinars: Numerous online platforms offer a vast array of courses and webinars on various subjects, from art and history to technology and science. Seniors can explore their interests and acquire new knowledge from the comfort of their homes, fostering a sense of accomplishment.

E-books and Audiobooks: Technology has made reading more accessible than ever. Seniors can access a multitude of e-books and audiobooks, tailoring their reading experience to suit their preferences. This not only enhances their mental agility but also provides hours of enjoyment.

Virtual Museums and Tours: Technology allows seniors to virtually explore museums and historical sites from around the world. This immersive experience can spark curiosity and a love for culture and history, contributing to a more enriched life.

Language Learning Apps: Learning a new language can be an enjoyable and mentally stimulating experience. Language learning apps make it convenient for seniors to embark on a linguistic journey, opening doors to new connections and cultural insights.



November and December's Website

dementiafriends.org

Quotes

Christmas is most truly Christmas when we celebrate it by giving the light of love to those who need it most.

-Ruth Carter Stapleton

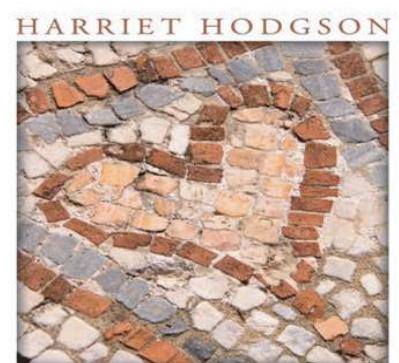
Christmas is love in action. Every time we love, every time we give, its Christmas.

-Dale Evans

This Month's Book

The Family Caregivers Guide

by Harriet Hodgson



Online Workshops and Craft Tutorials:

Seniors with a creative flair can access online workshops and craft tutorials. These activities provide a creative outlet and offer a sense of accomplishment as they create beautiful works of art or master new skills.

Digital Gardening and Horticulture Resources:

For seniors with a green thumb or an interest in gardening, technology provides access to digital gardening resources, including planting guides, garden design apps, and virtual gardening communities. These resources allow seniors to nurture their love for plants and connect with fellow garden enthusiasts.

In an era where physical distances may separate families and friends, technology steps in as a bridge to connect hearts. The health benefits of technology extend far beyond convenience, empowering seniors to take control of their well-being. Engaging in lifelong learning through technology not only keeps the mind sharp but also promotes a positive outlook on life. In this digital era, technology stands as a guardian of mental health, supporting seniors in their pursuit of a fulfilling and vibrant life. Embracing technology can lead to happier, healthier, and more connected senior years. In a world where technology often seems geared towards the younger generation, it's essential to recognize and celebrate the positive impact it has on seniors' mental health and overall quality of life.



Thanksgiving Day is a cherished holiday celebrated annually on the fourth Thursday of November. It is a time for expressing gratitude, sharing a bountiful meal, and spending quality time with loved ones.

Thanksgiving Day holds a significant place in American culture and tradition. It originated as a harvest festival to thank the Native Americans for their help in sustaining the early settlers. Over the years, it has evolved into a time of gratitude, family gatherings, and joyful festivities.

May your Thanksgiving be a time to reflect on the blessings in your life and to cherish the moments that bring you joy. Wishing you a heartfelt and Happy Thanksgiving.



Making Joyful Holidays for People with Memory Disorders

For those living with Alzheimer's disease or dementia, the excitement of the holiday season might have the opposite effect. Baylor College of Medicine experts have a few tips to help make this season as joyful as possible for those with memory disorders and their families.

"Too much noise and activity along with a disruption of routine can be overwhelming for someone with dementia. It can cause them to withdraw, become angry or scared," said Dr. Mary Kenan, a psychologist with Baylor's Alzheimer's Disease and Memory Disorders Center.

Maintaining a routine is important in reducing agitation and improving mood. Disruption can trigger behavioral symptoms, which also can make care giving more difficult.

Kenan offers some tips to help create a meaningful holiday for all

- Focus on the present. Alzheimer's and other memory disorders are progressive diseases that each year can bring new changes and challenges. Try not to compare past holidays to the current condition.
- Rather than test your loved one's memory by asking, "Do you remember who this is?" introduce each person by name. For example, "This is Jane, your niece."
- Schedule times for family and friends to arrive or visit in small groups. If that isn't an option, find a side room or area where guests can visit quietly with your loved one.
- Include your loved one in certain tasks for the day, such as setting the table or decorating, if you know they can handle the undertaking.
- Try to maintain routine as much as possible. If your loved one with a memory disorder customarily takes a walk after eating lunch or dinner, try to maintain this activity and go with him or her.
- Watch for signs of anxiety or distress and intervene immediately using techniques you know may calm him or her down. For some that means sitting quietly together, going for a walk or even taking a drive around the block.
- Develop new ways of marking the holiday season. For example, ask family and friends to come prepared to tell a favorite story from past holiday seasons involving the loved one with Alzheimer's. Reminiscing is an important therapeutic tool.
- Use the sights, sounds and smells of the holidays to stimulate your loved one's senses. Your loved one may be able to participate in the singing of well-learned holiday songs.
- Ask for help. Caregiver's stress also can increase the stress of your loved one. Delegate holiday responsibilities to friends or family.

"Patients with Alzheimer's disease can still enjoy the holidays," Kenan said. "Be sensitive to your loved one's strengths and limitations, as well as your own as a caregiver, and celebrate accordingly."

Source: Baylor College of Medicine

Winter Activities for Older Adults and Retirees

"It's important to get outside as much as possible, whether it's temperate or even if it's colder, as long as it's safe to do so," said Dr. Angela Catic, associate professor in the Roy M. and Phyllis Gough Huffington Center on Aging at Baylor. "If it's cold, bundling up and getting outside is good for your spirit and good for you physically."

While older adults should be cautious of snowy or icy conditions, Catic suggests they continue engaging in the outdoor activities they typically enjoy, such as walking, biking or being out in nature. Unless they were skiers or active in winter sports before, older adults should not pick up skiing or snowboarding later in life due to the risk of injury. Individuals who normally garden outdoors can focus on growing indoor plants in the winter. Plan for the upcoming growing season by looking at gardening catalogues and deciding what to plant when spring arrives.

Winter also is a great time to explore indoor activities inside or outside the home:

At home:

- Reading
- Puzzles
- Playing games
- Knitting

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- Crafting

Outside the home:

- Attending concerts
- Visiting museums
- Taking road trips

Recent retirees might find it difficult to pick up hobbies after being in a career-oriented routine for many years. Catic recommends reflecting on activities they enjoyed in the past, before they were focused on work, such as reading. Adult education programs offer classes for a variety of hobbies, including woodworking, sewing, crafting or birdwatching. The public library contains a multitude of resources and nonfiction books that can teach different skills, like gourmet cooking or quilting. Friends can provide information about their own hobbies, and volunteer work is a rewarding way to fill time while giving back to the community. Although searching for hobbies takes time and exploration, retirees will eventually find something they enjoy.

"We want to keep ourselves active, both physically and mentally, and hobbies often do that. They bring joy and fun to our lives, and that is so important in terms of preserving cognitive function and mental health," Catic said. "We encourage people to be engaged and do things they enjoy that connect them to their community."

Source: Baylor College of Medicine

Five Reasons That a Living Trust is Better than a Will

by *Richard Barid, JD, Michael Smith, JD*

When most people think of estate planning, they think of a will.

A will sets out who you are, who will oversee setting up your estate when you pass away, and how you want your assets distributed. It also establishes a guardian for minor children, if any.

Seems like it covers all the bases, so what's the problem?

While a will seems good in theory, in practice, problems can arise -- especially if you have children with special needs. Here are five reasons to add a revocable "living" trust to your estate plan.

1. The Probate Process: Hollywood would have you believe that probate is as easy as a lawyer sitting behind a big desk to read the will to the heirs the day after the funeral. The probate process can take several months to several years depending on the size and complexity of the estate and the schedule of the probate court. During probate, the court assesses the deceased's assets, prioritizes final payments to creditors, resolves disputes, and identifies and distributes remaining assets to heirs and beneficiaries. Unlike a will, trust can be executed immediately.

2. Disputes: One of the main causes of a lengthy probate process is family dispute over the will. Disputes arise for many reasons. Your children may object if you want to leave your assets to your new spouse. Or one child may feel entitled to a larger share of the inheritance for any number of reasons. An heir may contest the will if they believe you were unduly influenced or mentally incapacitated at the time the will was written. Since trust is not subject to probate, it is also harder to dispute.

3. Privacy: Probate is a public process meaning that anyone who could have a claim to your estate can petition the court for that right -- even estranged family members. By contrast, trusts are private, allowing you to maintain more direct control over who receives what.

4. Minor or Special Needs Children: Distribution of assets is the last step of the probate process, which, as mentioned before, may take several months to several years. A will should designate a guardian for minor children, or children with special needs. Although the court may award the guardian an allowance to care for the children during the probate process, it may not be enough to adequately care for the children. Funds from a living trust, however, can be available immediately.

5. Cost: Probate fees can include court costs, bond fees, appraisal fees and executor's fees. The longer the process, the higher the cost. Grieving heirs may also want to hire a probate attorney to walk them through the lengthy and confusing process. All these fees are paid by the decedent's estate, reducing the overall inheritance. The overall cost of settling a trust is often lower than the cost of settling an estate through the probate process.

A "living" trust is a powerful estate planning tool that offers all the

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benefits of a will (and more) without many of the drawbacks. Like a will, revocable living trusts allow you to maintain control of your property. They also allow for flexibility. You can add assets, such as a home and stock, to the trust while still living in the home and buying or selling stock or other property. You can change the terms of trust at any point during your life, if you have capacity. Once you die, trust becomes irrevocable, or unchangeable, ensuring that your wishes are fulfilled.

A trusted estate planning attorney can help you write a revocable living trust that meets the needs of your situation and eliminates the uncertainty of a will on its own.

Extreme Cold Temperatures Create Serious Health Risk

by ACEP

Temperatures are plummeting across much of the country and some areas may even see some of the coldest temperatures on record. The nation's emergency physicians warn that this could be potentially life-threatening and urge people to prepare now.

"The cold in certain parts of the country is not just uncomfortable – it's downright dangerous," said Vidor Friedman, MD, FACEP, president of the American College of Emergency Physicians. "Even a few minutes in cold temperatures like this can cause serious risk to your health. Make sure you are ready, make sure your home is ready and do not stay outside if you don't have to be out."

Dr. Friedman adds that even a few minutes in the severe cold that is predicted can cause frostbite and hypothermia.

Symptoms of hypothermia include:

- Slurred speech
- Sluggishness
- Confusion
- Shallow, slow breathing
- Unusual behavior
- Slow, irregular heartbeat

Other signs may include a lack of sensation in the affected area; and skin that appears waxy, cold to the touch or discolored (flushed, white, gray, yellow, blue or purple). To prevent hypothermia, avoid prolonged exposure to the cold, ensure adequate heating, and dress appropriately for the environment and circumstances. In addition, avoid excessive alcohol consumption and the use of illegal substances, which can increase the risk of hypothermia.

As temperatures drop, it's more likely that people stay inside. In the house, it's important to make sure that carbon monoxide detectors are working, you are using heaters or radiators safely and appropriately. Now is the time to make sure your pets are accounted for and safe.

"If you must go outside, do so sparingly and dress appropriately for the cold," said Dr. Friedman. "Check on your friends and loved ones and be particularly mindful of vulnerable people – children, the elderly or people that may have nowhere safe or warm to go. If you think you are having an emergency, please call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department."



Happy Holidays



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