



advice and support for older age

**Independent
Age**

Factsheet

Technology to help you at home

Technology to help you live independently at home is becoming increasingly common. It provides a convenient, discreet way to get help when you need it or to monitor your health.

This factsheet looks at:

Telecare – including devices such as personal alarms, smoke and temperature alarms, and sensors to detect falls

Telehealth – devices to monitor health conditions, reducing the need to visit a GP

Call FREE on **0800 319 6789** Visit **www.independentage.org**

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About Independent Age

Whatever happens as we get older, we all want to remain independent and live life on our own terms. That's why, as well as offering regular friendly contact and a strong campaigning voice, Independent Age can provide you and your family with clear, free and impartial advice on the issues that matter: care and support, money and benefits, health and mobility.

A charity founded over 150 years ago, we're independent so you can be.

The information in this factsheet applies to England only.

If you're in Wales, contact Age Cymru (0800 022 3444, agecymru.org.uk) for information and advice.

In Scotland, contact Age Scotland (0800 12 44 222, agescotland.org.uk).

In Northern Ireland, contact Age NI (0808 808 7575, ageni.org).

In this factsheet, you'll find reference to our other publications. You can order them by calling 0800 319 6789, or by visiting independentage.org/information

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1. What is telecare?

Many people are using technology to make their lives easier. For people with care needs or long-term health conditions there is now a growing range of assistive technology services. These services can promote independence and minimise risk without intruding unnecessarily on your dignity and privacy.

Telecare can help you manage risks at home, and provide you and your family with reassurance that you can get help in an emergency. Telecare devices include sensors which trigger alarms to call for help, wearable alarms and reminders to take medication. You can use telecare to:

- reduce the chance of problems occurring. For example, a bed sensor can raise an alarm if you get out of bed in the night and don't return after a certain time, reducing your risk of not being found after a fall.
- reduce the risk of harm. For example, a device such as a sensor worn on the body that can detect a fall, heat sensor that can identify extreme temperatures or smoke or carbon

monoxide detectors can all trigger an automatic call for help quickly.

- monitor problems. Telecare systems can monitor what is happening in the home and highlight patterns that may be of concern. For example, if an activity monitor shows a pattern of you needing to go to the bathroom during particular hours of the night, this may indicate a problem with your medication. Asking your GP for a review of your medication and how you take it could help you get a better night's sleep.

Telecare devices can include:

- portable, wearable alarms
- fixed alarms, such as pull cords
- movement sensors – for example, to detect when someone has fallen out of bed or to trigger a check-up call if they don't move for a long time
- gas shut-off devices to decrease the risk of someone forgetting to turn off a gas ring or fire

- pill dispensers to release medication at the appropriate time and trigger an alarm if it isn't removed from the dispenser
- incontinence sensors to trigger a call if bedding becomes damp
- temperature sensors or fire and smoke alarms that trigger calls for assistance.

Telecare doesn't have to involve specialist equipment. If you have a smart phone or a voice-controlled virtual assistant (such as Amazon Echo or Google Home), you could use these to help you stay independent at home. Some councils are trialling these instead of telecare, or you could simply set yours up to remind you to take medication at certain times or to call for help if you need it.

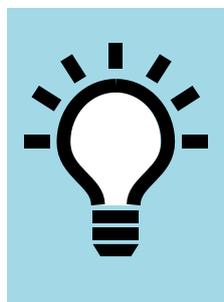
2. How does telecare work?

Telecare should be discreet and easy to use. You will usually need a control box (also called a base unit or telecare unit) which plugs into the mains and into either your telephone line or internet connection. Depending on what services you need, you'll get sensors to place around your home and/or a pendant to wear. Pendants can be worn as a necklace, watch, or clipped onto clothing. Depending on what they are designed to detect, sensors can be placed in different rooms, on doors or on furniture such as a bed or chair. The sensors, pendant and control box communicate by radio signals, so there aren't any trailing wires to worry about.

The control box is connected to a support centre which offers help 24 hours a day. When you press the pendant button or one of the sensors is activated, the box automatically dials the support centre. Help may be sent straight away or an operator may speak to you through the telecare device. They will have all your details, so if you can't speak to them, they will know who you are, where you live, and who to contact in case of an emergency – your 'nominated person'.

You could give your nominated person a spare key to let themselves and/or you may want to consider getting a key safe installed. This is a small box which can be discreetly attached to the wall near the main entrance of your home. It is locked with a code that the support centre can also give to the emergency services if they need to get in to help you. A key safe should be in a place that's out of site and fitted correctly. If possible, get a key safe with the 'Secured by Design' logo.

Good to know



There are also telecare services which can be used on your mobile phone. These are sometimes referred to as mCare. You can find out more by visiting tsa-voice.org.uk/consumer-services/what-is-mcare.

3. How can I get telecare services?

Help from the council

Your local council should offer some telecare services, but the options and criteria for getting help will vary from area to area. Contact your local council's adult social services department to find out what's available in your area.

The first step is to ask the social services team for a care needs assessment to see if you meet the criteria for getting care and support services. Tell them that you would like an occupational therapist to be involved in your assessment, because they can identify what aids and equipment might be appropriate for you. For more information see our factsheet **First steps in getting help with your care needs**.

If the council assesses you as needing support services (including telecare) they will give you a financial assessment to see how much you should contribute towards the help you need. Charges may vary from area to area. In some areas, some telecare services may be free of charge, while other councils will install the devices free of charge but ask you to pay a weekly charge for the service.

Help from the NHS

The NHS may pay for telecare as part of a NHS Continuing Healthcare or intermediate care package, if you're eligible. See our factsheets **Continuing healthcare – should the NHS be paying for your care** or **Hospital stays** to find out more.

Buying telecare privately

If you don't meet the council criteria for services, or the council doesn't offer the type of telecare service you want to use, you may want to look into the costs of arranging telecare privately. Shop around and research as many options as possible to make sure you get the best service for you. Ask if you can have a trial before you commit to a particular device or service, so you can make sure it works for you.

If you arrange telecare privately, the company usually charges an initial set-up fee and a weekly or monthly monitoring fee. Your local council or the Telecare Services Association ([01625 520 320](tel:01625520320), tsa-voice.org.uk) should be able to provide details of companies who offer telecare in your area.

The Disabled Living Foundation provides information about the different kinds of telecare service and the costs that could be involved ([0300 999 0004](tel:03009990004), dlf.org.uk/factsheets/telecare).

Try before you buy

Trying out telecare services before you buy it is a good idea. You can do this at:

- Disabled Living Centres or Independent Living Centres – find your nearest centre in local directories, ask your local council or ask the Disabled Living Foundation ([0300 999 0004](tel:03009990004))
- Equipment Demonstration Centres – contact your nearest centre to find out what telecare equipment you can try and to book an appointment. Contact details for your nearest Equipment Demonstration Centre can be found on the Disabled Living Foundation's webpage livingmadeeasy.org.uk/contacts_edc.ph or call [0300 999 0004](tel:03009990004).

Check expert opinions

Before choosing your telecare service, compare prices and read consumer reports from organisations such as:

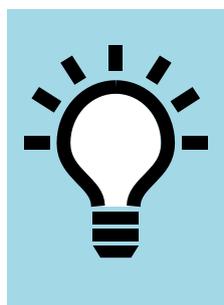
- the Disabled Living Foundation (0300 999 0004, dlf.org.uk)
- Rica (020 7427 2460, rica.org.uk)

You might also find it useful to read information from the Telecare Services Association (TSA), the representative body for telecare in the UK.

The TSA can provide you with details of accredited telecare service providers who meet the TSA's code of practice standards (01625 520 320, tsa-voice.org.uk).

Try to get at least three quotes to compare prices before making a purchase. Find out if the price includes any extras such as maintenance and aftercare.

Good to know



You'll need to change the batteries regularly to get the best use out of your telecare system, so make sure you're shown how to do this when the equipment is installed.

4. Is telecare right for you?

If you're not used to using technology the idea of telecare may be daunting. However, some people find that telecare can be a cost-effective way of keeping them safe and providing reassurance, without being overly intrusive. You shouldn't worry about triggering calls to the support centre by accident – the staff will be used to this and will reassure you that it isn't a problem.

Telecare can only alert you or your nominated person to something that needs attention – it can't replace one-to-one care and support from another person. In some cases telecare services may, however, reduce the need for some home care visits. For example, if you use a telecare device to prompt you to take your medication or eat and drink, you may no longer need a carer to do this. If you receive care through your council they must reassess your needs before any services can be replaced by telecare services.

Think carefully and realistically about whether telecare is right for you. Telecare won't necessarily improve your quality of life, reduce your need for home care or make it less likely you'll need to go to hospital. It may be that other

equipment or services are better for you. For example, you might benefit from small adaptations around the home, such as a bath seat, handrails, bed raising blocks or a perching stool. Any aids and minor adaptations (those that cost up to £1000 to install) that you're assessed as needing must be provided free of charge. Our factsheets **Adapting your home to stay independent** and **Choosing disability equipment** have more information.

Reviewing how your telecare is working

If you are receiving telecare as part of a care and support plan produced by social services, this plan must be reviewed to see if it works for you. Social services should do a light touch review after 6-8 weeks to spot any teething problems, and then a full review every year. A review is a good chance to take stock of what is and isn't working for you, so do let them know if telecare isn't right for you.

5. How much does telecare cost?

Most councils charge something for telecare services. You may have to pay for telecare in full, or contribute towards the cost depending on your income and savings.

Councils may charge different rates depending on which telecare service you wish to use, or they may charge a flat rate for all their telecare services. The council may provide the telecare devices free of charge, and charge you a weekly amount to cover the cost of maintenance and the response centre costs. Every council must provide clear information on how they charge for their services.

If you're buying telecare privately, shop around to look for the best prices.

Things to consider

When considering telecare, think about the following:

- Have you had a care needs assessment from your council's adult social services department? It may show that you're entitled to other forms of support in addition to a telecare service.

- Do you understand how the telecare service will work? Will telecare make your daily life feel safer, or will it make things feel more complicated?
- If you're paying for the service, do you feel you're getting value for money? Or would you be better off spending your money on a home carer, for example?
- Do you have someone who can be your nominated person (see chapter 2)?
- Who will set up and maintain the equipment?
- Can you change the batteries when necessary, or do you have someone who can help you with this?
- Have you checked compatibility? If you use your council's provider or have already privately arranged telecare, you may have to continue using the same company if you want to add additional devices
- How long will it take for your nominated person to get to you when you need them? Do they have other commitments or have to travel a long way, which may make it difficult for them

to get to you in an emergency? If so, consider if there are any more practical options.

- Do you have a key safe? If the emergency services need to get into your home, how will they be able to get in to help you if you can't open the door?
- Can you afford the initial cost and ongoing charges?
- Are you claiming Attendance Allowance? This is a disability benefit for people aged 65 or over. You may be entitled to it if you need help with personal care. Read our factsheet **Attendance Allowance**.
- If you're arranging telecare privately, have you considered all the features you'll need and researched the different services? Have you considered what will happen if something goes wrong with the device, and what it may cost to call out an engineer? Is general maintenance included in the price and, if so, how regularly should the equipment be checked?
- If a carer or family member is arranging telecare for you, make sure you understand how it will monitor you. If this is a concern, talk to your nominated person. If necessary,

call an advice service such as Independent Age ([0800 319 6789](tel:08003196789)) to talk through the situation or explore other options which may be more suitable for you.

- Consider what would happen if you don't like the service once it's installed – check if there a cancellation period or trial period. Is there a minimum charge which may tie you in to the service for a period of time, even if you don't want to use it?

6. What is telehealth and how do I get it?

Telehealth is designed to help people living with certain long-term health conditions which need to be monitored to live a more independent and healthy life. As with telecare, telehealth uses a combination of equipment and technology and can allow you to monitor your health or manage your treatment without having to visit your GP or hospital.

Telehealth devices can transmit readings and information directly to your health professional, a nominated family member or a carer. This can allow them to track and identify any changes in your condition. Here are some examples of telehealth devices.

- If you need help to remember to take your medication, attend appointments or perform regular health checks, a telehealth system can send automatic reminders to your mobile phone.
- If you have high blood pressure, a telehealth device can monitor your blood pressure at home and send the results automatically to

your doctor, nurse or blood pressure specialist. This can help them manage your medication or alert them that urgent action needs to be taken if your blood pressure gets too high.

- If you're taking warfarin, you can use a telehealth device to monitor the levels in your bloodstream from home. This device can replace the need to attend a blood clinic for regular checks. You will be prompted at regular periods to do the test and submit the data using a keypad on the device. The warfarin clinic will then advise if any change in dosage is required.
- If you have a respiratory condition such as asthma you can get a telehealth device that monitors oxygen levels in your blood. Your doctor, nurse, or asthma specialist can check the readings and intervene if your condition deteriorates. This could mean that action is taken early to prevent a serious asthma attack from occurring.
- If you're diabetic and use insulin, you can get a telehealth device to monitor your blood sugar levels. The device can alert you if your blood sugar gets too high or too low so you can

adjust your insulin dosage. This helps prevent episodes of hyperglycaemia or hypoglycaemia.

How can I get telehealth services?

Many telehealth devices are provided by a health professional, who should also show you how to use it and explain how it will help them support your health condition.

If you're interested in telehealth – for example, because you have to have frequent appointments and check-ups for a particular long-term condition – speak to your GP or the health professional who supports you with this condition. They can advise you about whether your condition can be supported by telehealth and what is available in your area. If it's provided by the NHS, the service may be provided free of charge.

For further information see the Disabled Living Foundation website (livingmadeeasy.org.uk) or the Telecare Services Association website (tsa-voice.org.uk)

Check with a healthcare professional if you're considering buying telehealth privately. They may want to be involved with any information or monitoring the telehealth device can provide.

7. Useful contacts



If you want to discuss anything you have read in this factsheet, you can contact our Helpline to arrange to speak to an adviser ([0800 319 6789](tel:08003196789), advice@independentage.org).

To find out more about the types of telecare equipment which could help you at home, contact:

- the Disabled Living Foundation ([0300 999 0004](tel:03009990004), dlf.org.uk)
- the Telecare Services Association ([01625 520 320](tel:01625520320), tsa-voice.org.uk)
- Rica ([020 7427 2460](tel:02074272460), rica.org.uk).

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Thank you

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