

Stay safe from home hazards

Worried about staying safe at home, or a frail relative living alone? Our experts have selected ingenious gadgets to help

AT A GLANCE

- ▶ How 'assistive technology' devices can help with staying independent and safe at home
- ▶ Gadgets to deter telephone cold-callers, through to alerting help if someone falls
- ▶ Where you can buy them

Your home is your haven – but it's also the place where the most accidents happen, resulting in more than 5,000 deaths annually and 2.7 million visits to Accident & Emergency. Children under five and people over 65 (particularly 75 plus) are most likely to have an accident at home.

You've told us that cold-calling telephone scams, intruders and bogus callers are your biggest safety worries, but it is actually falls that make up the majority of accidents, particularly for older people. Measures that prevent falling, or minimise the consequences by alerting someone early, are key to avoiding this most common home hazard.

In this vein, there's a growing market for 'assistive technology' gadgets and systems that help older people stay safe and independent.

At the sophisticated end of the market, you can buy kit that enables you to monitor how a relative hundreds of miles away is coping. At the simpler end of the scale, there's a host of everyday helpers available to prevent problems, such as forgetting your keys or inadvertently leaving a bath to overflow.

Assessed by experts

With so many gadgets out there, we asked a panel of experts to sift through the market and recommend a good range.

Our panel included telecare and digital health firm T-Cubed and Croydon telecare coordinator Brian Longman. Brian, and Kirstie Dalrymple, an occupational therapist and equipment consultant at OTWorks, have also reviewed the products, assessing whether they meet their claims and whether they are robust and easy to set up and use. We also asked Croydon Carers Support Centre carers group to review our recommended products and the possible pros and cons for their relatives.

Personal monitoring & alerts

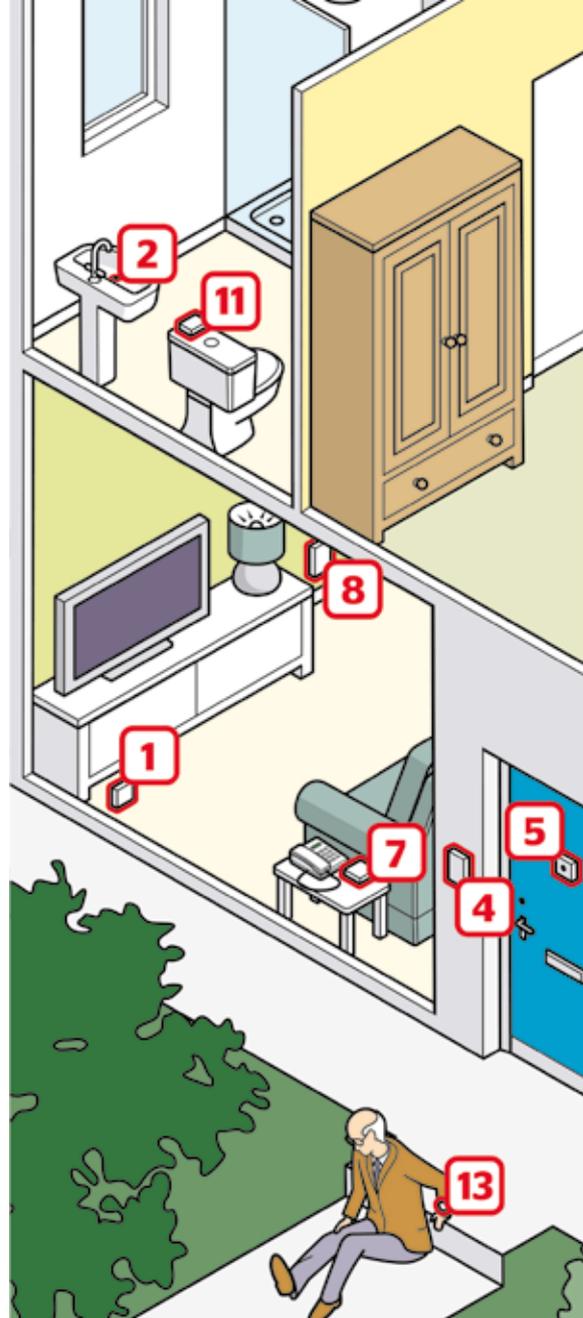
Councils have provided emergency or 'community' alarm systems for many years but, with an ageing population and cash-strapped local authorities, there are now many more products available to buy privately – and more solutions that can send alerts directly to relatives and help someone cope alone.

You can monitor if a relative who lives alone is up and about as you'd expect (using sensors to relay information to your computer or smartphone), use a safe-walking device to locate a relative with dementia who gets lost, or have their telephone cold-callers diverted.

These new technologies don't come without tricky issues: you're weighing up privacy and safety, and replacing – or complementing – human contact with technology and call centres.

And no product suits everybody, so a professional assessment of your needs can be important to get the right product with the right features. For example, it's unsafe if a stove alarm tells your mum that she's left a saucepan on the hob if she doesn't understand the beeping or is unable to act on it because of her dementia.

If you are striving to care for a relative or to stay independent, you will inevitably balance risk and surveillance with quality of life and wellbeing. Assistive technology is simply one tool in your armoury.



Quick and easy buys

Simple everyday gadgets to help with peace of mind

1 Fake TV Burglar Deterrent £25

It switches on after dusk and simulates the light of a real HD television for four or seven hours to deter burglars (can be put on timer).

0845 373 1353, faketcv.co.uk



✓ Gadgets to help at home



2 Magiplug £9
A bath or sink plug that drains excess water over a certain level, preventing floods. It also changes colour when the water is too hot.
07932 354228, magiplug.com



3 Dayclox (i7.1 model) £69
Easy-to-read 7-inch digital clock with day, time and date. Automatically dims at night. Helps those with poor memory or sight.
01745 355460, dayclox.com



ILLUSTRATION BY: MARK WATKINSON

4 Supra C500 Keysafe £60
WHAT IS IT? A covered metal box that is opened by tapping a code into the keypad. Mount it on a wall outside your home to store a spare house key. Anyone who has the code can let themselves in, so you would need to change the code regularly.



WHO IS IT GOOD FOR?
People who can't let in visitors, such as home carers. Anyone who

forgets their keys regularly.
OUR VERDICT Excellent quality, our experts said. A heavy and robust safe that needs DIY or professional skills to drill and secure it to a solid wall. Put it in a discreet place or it could advertise that a vulnerable person is living there.
01905 770333, keysafe.co.uk

5 Brinno PHV MAC14 Door Viewer £125
WHAT IS IT? A motion-activated peephole camera that sits behind the peephole on a front door. Callers are detected by motion sensor and photographed with the date and time, whether or not you are at home, and can then be reviewed on the 3-inch screen,



or on your computer.
WHO IS IT GOOD FOR?
Anyone wary of, or vulnerable to, bogus or doorstep callers.

OUR VERDICT Effective and gives good peace of mind. Easy to install if you've basic DIY skills and there's an existing peephole. Not suitable if the occupier tends to open the door anyway and instead needs a 24-hour monitoring 'telecare' system. Need SD card (from £15/32GB) to store images.
0845 337 3073, brinnouk.co.uk

6 Innohome Stove Alarm £30
WHAT IS IT? This battery-operated alarm is attached beneath your electric or gas cooker hood with magnets, or screwed to the wall or cooker panel. It learns how you use the cooker (to help prevent false alarms) and sounds an alarm when the cooker temperature rises, before a fire ignites.



WHO IS IT GOOD FOR?
Someone easily distracted or forgetful who leaves the cooker turned on and unattended, risking

a potential fire. They need to be able to understand the alarm and act upon it.
OUR VERDICT A useful safety alert. However, it doesn't provide emergency assistance, such as a fire alarm/heat sensor linked to a call centre. One expert found it confusing to set up, the other straightforward.
07546 452633, innohome.com

7 TrueCall Care (re-named TrueCall Secure) £120
WHAT IS IT? This phone system can block unwanted callers while letting trusted callers through. Other callers hear a personalised message, directing them, for example, to ring a family member who can check the call is bona fide. The



trusted and barred caller logs can be remotely managed over the internet or a telephone handset.
WHO IS IT GOOD FOR?
People that are particularly

vulnerable to telephone cold-calling tactics.
OUR VERDICT Our carers group welcomed the peace of mind provided by the filtering of rogue calls to a relative. Initial set-up needs a little time to tailor it to your needs, as it has lots of options. Caller ID needs to be activated on your line.
0800 033 6339, truecall.co.uk

All prices include VAT. Enquire whether delivery costs are included.

EXPERT VIEW

PREVENTING COLD-CALLERS AND INTRUDERS

Joanna Pearl, Which? homes researcher



Your home is your castle, and you have clear rights when it comes to intercepting invaders.

Uninvited or cold-callers who ignore a sticker or notice stating that you don't wish to receive them may be committing a criminal offence, as is a trader who ignores your requests to leave and not return.

Trading Standards recommends always saying no to anyone cold-calling, no matter how plausible, as it's an approach favoured by rogue traders. The most likely companies to turn up unannounced are utility companies, many of which operate schemes where you can register a password that their official representative must give you.

For front door security, gadgets range from the sophisticated – a digital door viewer that takes photos of callers – to a simple door chain that can be unlocked from the outside (good if you care for a relative who keeps a chain on the door).

Make sure your house looks occupied, even when you're away, and that it's not obvious if a vulnerable person lives there. For example, a messy garden can tempt a prowling rogue trader to knock.

Helpful technology includes the simple Fake TV, which simulates a real TV behind the curtains while you're away, to a home security system that allows you to monitor your home remotely for temperature, sound and movement, using your smartphone or tablet.



8 Envirotxt £99
WHAT IS IT? A small plug-in unit with a Sim card that can monitor the temperature in a frail relative's home and alert you by text if it rises or drops outside pre-set limits, or if there's a mains power failure.
WHO IS IT GOOD FOR? A frail relative who could

mistakenly turn off or unplug the heating system, or experience a power cut.
OUR VERDICT Easy to install, use and move around, but you'll need a Sim card, and the house needs to be in an area with a mobile phone signal (even if they don't have a mobile).
020 3176 3094, tekview-solutions.com



9 Mr Beams Universal Light £12.50
WHAT IS IT? This bright, battery-operated white LED light turns on automatically when it's dark and detects movement within 3m – good for preventing falls in the night.
WHO IS IT GOOD FOR? People who are prone

to falling and forget to put the light on, or are away from home and therefore disorientated in the dark when they get up at night.
OUR VERDICT Simple but effective. The light is on for 30 seconds – a more expensive version shines for 60 seconds.
01452 618850, mrbeams.co.uk



10 Memo Minder Mark II £19.50
WHAT IS IT? The motion detector senses someone walking past and plays a personalised message in a relative's voice, for example, when placed near the front door: 'Mum, don't forget your keys.' You can also use it to record a short message relaying the day's tasks.

WHO IS IT GOOD FOR? Good for someone living alone who needs reminding about a specific task.
OUR VERDICT Easy to use and move. Our carers group and experts agreed it's only suitable for the right person – some may be frightened by a disembodied voice.
01352 736125, solonsecurity.co.uk

Could your relative benefit from telecare?



Telecare systems monitor vulnerable people and can send alerts when help is needed. At its most basic, telecare lets a person call for help by pressing an alarm button on a watch (left) or a necklace pendant. More intelligent pendants (pictured right) can also sense a fall. Both alert a call centre to organise help.

Other sensors around a home can flag risks, such as someone not returning to bed within a pre-set time. Sensors can include:

- Smoke/heat sensors (kitchen)
- Bed exit/occupancy sensors (underneath mattress)
- Flood detectors (bathroom)
- Door-exit sensors
- Natural gas detector
- Carbon monoxide detector.

Telecare can be a godsend when people

can't monitor or respond to risks themselves, but it's important that the person is properly assessed to ensure they get the system that's right for them. Prices depend on the specification required, and councils set their own charges (if any). The watch and pendant shown here are from Tunstall (**01977 660479, tunstall.co.uk**). Other suppliers include Chubb and Tynetec.



11 Lifemax Home Safety Alert

Mark II £49

WHAT IS IT? A wireless, battery-operated home pager alert system. It includes a base station receiver and two transmitter pendants, both with call and panic buttons, with a range of 30m. You could keep one pendant permanently in the bathroom, for example.

WHO IS IT GOOD FOR?

Families caring for a sick or disabled relative at home.

OUR VERDICT Simple to operate, with a loud, clear



call for assistance. It might allow a carer to go into the garden or sleep more easily (the alarm is loud and you shouldn't sleep through it). But the person can't speak to the carer, only alert them via the button. **01635 588370, lifemaxuk.co.uk** (also available at Robert Dyas)

12 Canary

Buy £270 + £15/month monitoring;

Rent from £36/month

WHAT IS IT? An activity-monitoring system that allows people to check on relatives living elsewhere. It collects information on activity via room and door sensors – for example, how often they use the kitchen or get up at night – and can alert you to problems via a text or email.

WHO IS IT GOOD FOR?

People with dementia, or those who are frail and can't communicate how they are.



OUR VERDICT Easy to install and useful in the short-term, such as when a relative leaves hospital, to plan the right care, or to spot longer-term changes. The carers group liked the use of sensors rather than cameras. **01865 408366, canarycare.co.uk**

13 Buddi

Clip and wristband set (purchase + service plan): £299 + £6/week; Lease service plan: £12/week (clip-only cheaper)

WHAT IS IT?

A GPS personal-location tracker and fall detector. The wearer can call for help, or, if they travel outside their preset 'safe zone' while out, it will alert the call centre (24-hour response) or carer, and can locate them.

WHO IS IT GOOD FOR?

People who are prone to getting lost, falling or having medical emergencies when out.



OUR VERDICT It's robust, reliable, simple to set up, and has helpful extras, such as the fall detector and two-way audio. The person must agree and remember to wear it (and put up with occasional fall detector false alarms), it needs to be charged, and relatives need a plan to respond. **0800 978 8800, buddi.co.uk**

Buying the products you need

If you haven't found exactly what you're looking for here, or simply want more information on home-care products, here are some of our choosing and buying tips

Q How do I work out what I need?

A There are some useful websites to get you thinking, such as Living Made Easy (livingmadeeasy.org.uk/) and Co-operative Independent Living (co-operativeindependentliving.co.uk/).

Q Where can I get these products from?

A You have two options. The first is to buy them yourself (true for most of the products featured here). These products aren't generally available on the high street, so contact the companies to find stockists, or buy online.

For gadgets and alarms that are linked to a call centre (called telecare) and more complex needs, ask your local council for a telecare assessment – usually done by a specialist such as an occupational therapist.

Council telecare provision varies by area, but make sure you ask about the waiting time



for an assessment, the charge (if any) for the equipment, and the ongoing monitoring charge (each council sets its own).

See which.co.uk/homecareproducts for more information about choosing and buying products that will help you or a relative stay safe at home.

Q Is VAT payable on assistive technology products?

A If you have a long-term illness or you're disabled, you don't have to pay VAT on certain goods and services that are designed or adapted for your disability (see hmrc.gov.uk/vat).

THE BOTTOM LINE

There are some great gadgets that can help you or a frail relative stay independent and safe at home – from deterring bogus callers to preventing and dealing with falls. But you'll need to know what's available to buy privately or obtain from the council, so use our expert advice to select the right product with the features you need. And for more complex requirements, don't hesitate to get professional advice.

FIND OUT MORE

On Which.co.uk

- For our complete guide to assistive technology and more products to help you stay independent: which.co.uk/assistivetechology
- For practical home-security advice: which.co.uk/homesecurity

On Which? Elderly Care

- To find out more about getting an assessment of your needs: which.co.uk/elderlycareassessment
- To get advice on preventing and

dealing with falls: which.co.uk/elderlycarefalls

Other useful contacts

- Contact the Disabled Living Foundation helpline for advice on products for all aspects of daily living: **0300 999 0004, livingmadeeasy.org.uk**
- The Telecare Services Association is the representative body for the telecare industry within the UK. Its website contains details of telecare products on the market and services in local areas: telecare.org.uk