

# OLDER AND WISER: New technology can benefit our aging population

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Digital technology is here to stay, and it's gaining traction every day as it relates to seniors and healthy aging.

Some of us hate technology and wish for a time when there seemed to be more face to face communication and less reliance on devices meant to make our lives better.

In a November 2019 article from McMaster's University Optimal Aging Portal, which conducts healthy aging research, it states that, "As technology evolves, it continues to provide new benefits. Whether it is helping older adults stay connected to combat issues such as social isolation, or motivating us to set and achieve new goals, there's no doubt that there are many positive ways technology can help us as we age."

Seniors in Canada are using technology in greater numbers than ever before, according to Statistics Canada. A 2017 study published by Statistics Canada reveals that "68 per cent of those 65 years of age and older used the internet at least a few times a month. In addition, among 65- to 74-year-olds, internet use rose from 65 per cent to 81 per cent from 2013 to 2016, while among those aged 75 and older usage rose from 35 per cent to 50 per cent over these three years."

The role of technology in healthy aging for seniors involves using medical assisted devices; online tracking devices for home and community care facilities; accessing social media to keep us connected; using devices which motivate us to get us off the couch and into the mall for a walk about or just around

the neighbourhood; online games for fun and sometimes for addressing challenging cognitive issues; and using the internet to do research and read books.

The first time I felt that I should try out social media was when a friend said if you don't try Instagram or Facebook your grandkids might leave you behind. It is also great to connect over the internet with friends and family who live far away. I also use the internet for research purposes – much as I liked jostling for access to “real” books on shelves at the library, the convenience of online research is great.

According to one of Lionsview Seniors' Planning Society's board members, the power of social media became a solution in keeping her family connected to their mom who lived in another city. “It became a tool for my family, keeping us close. Mom became inspired to journal every night for the past five years!”

Even seniors' organizations are getting onboard with the latest technologies. The 411 Seniors Centre Society, located near downtown Vancouver, has created Powered by Age: “A unique podcast for seniors, by seniors, that tackles issues and topics pertinent to seniors in modern life, while also giving them a foothold in the world of technology, letting their voices be heard.” Of course, many seniors' centres are being asked by their clients to host more programming such as using email, Skype, Facebook, iPhones, new apps, and so on.

At a 2016 forum called the Future of Technology for Healthy Aging, it was stated that: “Technologies will help people take charge of their own health and improve access to care. Caregivers and their patients or loved ones will be more engaged and empowered because they can learn about a health condition online and join virtual support groups or access services.”

This month a conference on Healthy Aging organized by the United Way of the Lower Mainland showcased groups and organizations who are looking at various technologies for healthy aging. For example, Best Buy, one of the sponsors of the conference, has a product called Assured Living that is a wellness-monitoring solution. It allows caregivers to stay informed about their loved one's daily activities, with an assortment of connected devices within the home giving both the caregiver and the care recipient peace of mind.

The Canadian National Institute for the Blind states that if you have vision loss and have trouble seeing the screen, learning and using technology is a great remedy but takes some special know-how. The organization has workshops that cover a wide variety of “techie topics,” presented in a non-technical way. As one of their workshop leaders states, “Assistive technology does so much, and we can't wait to share it with you and your clients.”

The Science and Technology for Aging Research Institute is an interdisciplinary institute at Simon Fraser University. Researchers there are particularly interested in issues related to policy, innovation and research practice in the “Aging Tech” sector. Another service, located in Victoria, CanAssist takes a client-

focused approach to provide customized technologies and innovative programs where there are gaps in existing services for people with disabilities.

Like many seniors today, I grew up in a world that mostly operated without digital technology, but later worked in environments where computer use was part of the daily routine, so that now I feel that I can function in both worlds.

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