



Senior Tech Home Improvement – Senior Care Corner Show Transcript

Barry: Welcome to the Senior Care Corner Show. I'm Barry.

Kathy: And I'm Kathy. Thanks for joining us.

Barry: As always, you'll find us online at SeniorCareCorner.com with solutions, tools and information for family caregivers and others who care for and about senior adults.

Got another big episode for you today, we're going to be talking about more ways of modifying senior's homes to make them more livable for aging in place as they decide to grow older in those homes.

But before we get to that, Kathy, I believe you have some news items?

Kathy: I have several for us today, thank you Barry. Our first news item:

Constant Pain a Big Problem in Older Adults

Almost 19 million older adults report bothersome pain in the past month according to researchers using data from the National Health and Aging Trends Study.

52% of adults aged 65-69 and 56 of those 90 and up reported bothersome pain over the past month. These respondents included people living in communities and facilities.

Researchers thought that they would find that the amount of pain would rise as we aged but actually found that the incidence rate was constant.

Three fourths of those reporting pain had multiple pain sites and the pain impacted their ability to perform their activities of daily living.

Those with pain had slower gait speed, inability to walk three blocks, difficulty getting up and down and trouble grasping things.

Much pain in older adults goes untreated and some treatments actually make the seniors functional status worse. The goal of pain treatment is quality of life.

Barry: Well I guess you got to it at the end Kathy, but I was wondering there for a while if that was one of those studies that say "well in this case, yeah people are in pain but doesn't do anything about it". But I guess what you said is once they've identified the pain, it's a matter of treating what's causing it.

Kathy: Right, and we have to find the right pain treatment methods, there are many to choose from.

Our next news item:

1 in 8 Older Adults Reports a Mental Fog

A new government survey reports that 13% of Americans 60 and older felt they were increasing in confusion or mental difficulties in the prior year.

The Behavioral Risk Factors Surveillance Study found among 60,000 respondents over age 60 covering 21 states who answered affirmatively to a question asking whether they had experienced confusion or memory loss that is happening more often or getting worse in the past 12 months.

For those that answered yes, 35% indicated that their impaired thinking led to functional difficulties. 80% reported that they needed regular assistance but only half of them could get it from family members or friends.

The results show the need for non-institutionalized seniors with increased memory loss to receive services and support now and in the future. There appeared to be significant unmet needs in this population that healthcare providers could address.

The highest range of functional difficulty was reported in those 60 to 64 age group causing researchers to state that clinicians should not focus their attention only on the very old but also intervene with younger Americans with increased confusion.

Barry: Boy that is some kind of study. Especially when you consider that the results might actually be underreported since people may be less willing to report something that makes them feel like they're getting older.

Kathy: That's true. Our next news item:

Many Stroke Patients Don't Call 9 1 1

According to a new study, more than one third of people suffering from a stroke do not call 9 1 1 even though it's the fastest way to get lifesaving help.

The study reviewed how 200,000 stroke patients arrived at hospital emergency rooms from 2003 to 2010. 64% arrived by ambulance and the rest used other forms of transportation.

Those who used emergency transport had shorter pre-hospital and in-hospital delays. Researchers say "they arrived early, had prompter evaluation and received more rapid treatment".

Treatment occurs more quickly when transported via EMS since they contact the hospital and the staff is then ready to act as soon as the patient arrives. EMS personnel also know which facility has advanced stroke care and can transport patients directly there.



The President of the American Heart Association wants awareness campaigns to inform the public that time is brain – the faster the treatment, the better the outcome. Treatment should happen within two hours of symptoms beginning.

The study reports that 55% of those who came by ambulance had brain scans within 25 minutes compared with only 36% of those who came by other means. Reasons for not contacting emergency personnel included seniors didn't want to be a bother or they didn't recognize their symptoms.

Barry: I wonder how much of this is a case too of us not being too well served taking away things we see on TV and in movies where it almost seems heroic when people drive their loved ones to the hospital instead of waiting for emergency care to arrive.

Kathy: Well that could be possible but we have to spread the word that that's not the best course of action during a stroke.

Our final news item today:

As Pedestrians Age Rises, So Do Odds of Dying in a Traffic Accident

A recent report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention finds that people over 75 face double the risk of being killed in a traffic accident as a pedestrian than younger people age 34 and younger.

Pedestrians make up 4,000 of the 34,000 traffic related deaths each year. The CDC expects that with the overall increase in the number of people aging, this number will also increase.

They note that older people take fewer walks than younger people however, when struck the older person is more likely to die than the younger person.

Increasing frailty makes the older person more vulnerable to being hit in the first place. Age related declines in mental function, vision and physical abilities may place the older pedestrian at greater risk for being struck by a moving vehicle.

It was also found that men have a double risk of death as a pedestrian than females likely because they walk in more dangerous settings or take more chances when walking. Three fourths of pedestrian deaths occurred in cities.

The CDC warns that pedestrian fatalities can be prevented and cities should take steps to prevent these events such as installing speed bumps on some roadways, enforcing speeding and distracted driving laws and making safety zones for pedestrians.

Barry: That's very interesting. I mean it's no surprise the results that are there but just like the one before, it's good to publicize that and maybe make people think a little bit more.



Kathy: We just all need to be a little bit safer.

Barry: Thanks Kathy. Those were great news items as always!

We want to turn to our feature segment now.

Home Improvement Month Podcast

Did you know Kathy that May is home improvement month in the US?

Kathy: Oh, and I didn't get you a card!

Barry: That's okay; I don't think the card companies or florists have latched onto this one yet. I didn't even get a single email advertising any specials, though I did see some tweets and Facebook posts promoting home remodeling specials.

Kathy: Hmm. I think I would rather get a card.

Barry: Well okay, before this turns into a comedy routine I'd better steer things on the road here. The fact that May is home improvement month is, I think, intended as a prompt for homeowners to plan those summer projects and either make some big ticket purchases or hire a contractor do some even bigger ticket work in their homes. That's not why we're using the feature segment of this Senior Care Corner Show to talk about it, though.

With summer vacations on the horizon for many, some of them to visit senior loved ones – unless they already live nearby of course – this is a good time to start planning those projects for seniors who are aging in place in their own homes.

Kathy: Ahh, a favorite topic of ours.

Barry: Yes, we often talk about what we call “home seniorization” or modifying senior loved ones' homes so they're better suited to meet the needs of those whose bodies and I guess sometimes minds don't have the same capabilities as in past years. After all, most homes are designed targeting the needs of younger people, and often families, since those are the most frequent buyers of new homes in many communities.

Often senior loved ones live in the same home in which they raised their family and they'd like to stay there as long as possible, since they're comfortable, like the community and like the reminders around them of the wonderful things in their lives.

Others have downsized or even moved to another community or altogether different region of the country but may still be living in a home that's better suited to the needs of residents with easier reach, better balance, and maybe a bit less forgetfulness.

More to the point of our discussion today, though, all of those homes are probably built without today's – and certainly without tomorrow's – technology in mind. For the most part they accommodate the need to plug in devices, though maybe not as MANY devices are in many homes today, but not to connect them to each other and probably not to the web. That's something many family caregivers just might be able to do for senior loved ones.

Modifying seniors' Homes for Safety

Now before we move on to discuss home technology improvements, we want to make sure that safety modifications aren't overlooked. After all, being safe in their homes is a key to being able to age in place as long as possible to begin with. Yes, technology plays a role in that – a role that's going to grow with some of the newer and upcoming tech we've seen – but there are some basic "fixes" to senior loved ones homes that should be considered as well. We covered some in earlier episodes of the Senior Care Corner Show and will include links to a couple of those in our show notes but I think we really need to remind you of a few.

Kathy, why don't you walk through some of items we should consider addressing in seniors' homes for their safety?

Kathy: Sure. These are some basic items that can be addressed at little or no cost and don't need anything more than handy skills around the house.

- Look for items in seniors' kitchens that they might need but are on high shelves. Where reach or balance is a problem, they risk injury each time to go to use these items. Make sure they're on lower shelves.
- Still thinking about access in the kitchen, look for places where you can install pull out or rotating shelves to bring what is needed to the front and avoid the need to reach or lean to get what's needed.
- Also, if senior loved ones have weak or arthritic hands, take a look at the cabinet handles and drawer pulls to see if they're easy to grasp. If not, you can find some that are better suited at low cost in a home improvement store and they are usually pretty easy to change out.
- Look around for loose throw rugs in walkways or around the bedroom. If a rug is needed or desired in those particular locations, either replace them or find a way - - such as with carpet tape - - to secure the existing rugs so they're not slip or trip hazards.
- Don't forget to check the water heater setting and make sure it's set to 120 degrees or less to help prevent scalding from hotter water.

Barry: That lower temperature setting may help them save money on energy used to heat water as well.

Kathy: Good point.

- Alright, also look around for extension cords that might be damaged, which could cause a fire or shock injury, or are impeding walkways, which could result in trip and fall injuries. Replacement extension cords are inexpensive. As for those in the walkways, if you can't find a way for them to serve their purpose safely, which we sometimes can with a little creativity, moving an item that's plugged in to keep the cord out of the walkway might be a small inconvenience that saves a bigger problem later.
- Check out the light bulbs in the house, especially those in hard to reach places, and change out any that aren't working. These provide a double challenge to some seniors, both from the need to reach and trying to work in dark spaces if the light isn't working.
- Just one last thing I want to be sure to mention - - smoke detectors. Be sure they are installed and functioning where needed. If you don't visit the senior's home often, it might make sense to change out batteries each time to be safe.

Barry: That's a good list, Kathy. As you said, each of those takes little if any skill and can be accomplished at low or no cost.

Kathy: We have some more of those plus some that take a little more cost and a little more do-it-yourself skill in our Home Seniorization Checklist. Barry, why don't you put a link to this in the show notes as well?

Barry: Great idea, Kathy. Thanks I'll do that.

Home Internet Connectivity

Let's turn the focus to technology now. No, we're not going to talk about big ticket items like computers, TVs and other devices - - well, at least not directly. Sure, those are nice improvements to seniors' homes and lives, and we've discussed them before and yeah, we will in the future. Today we want to talk about home improvements that connect seniors' homes - - and your loved ones - - to the web.

When I say "connected to the web" I mean via Wi-Fi, not wired connections in the house. Sure, they might get by now with a couple of wired locations but it's really wireless connectivity with the web that is going to change their world as it is changing ours and will continue to do so for some time to come.

Why talk about connecting their homes to the web? Think of all the things that can be done through internet connections today. Depending on your age, you may have grown up with much of them in place and may even take them for granted. If you're like us though, maybe you've seen the internet through from the early times.

Kathy: You mean like that Prodigy account you had for a while Barry?



Barry: Wow, it's been a while since I thought about that or even that familiar dialup internet connection sound - - not to mention the all too frequent "trying to connect but not quite making it" sound. That was a real pain.

We talk a lot about the benefits to seniors of being active on social media and what being connected to the world outside the home can mean to their wellbeing, as well as that of the family members who can more easily stay connected and provide care from a distance. There is a lot more that having their home connected to the web can mean for them, though.

Having Wi-Fi in the home can enable them to use smartphones and other devices that they would otherwise have connected to the cellular carrier's system. Using Wi-Fi in the home can not only speed up things in many cases but, more importantly for many, allows the use of a less expensive data plans for the devices when using them outside the home.

Think of all the other devices that already connect to the web via Wi-Fi, such as cable boxes, Blu-ray players, TVs and more.

Kathy: That includes the Wii or other game consoles many seniors have now for fun and to exercise their bodies and minds.

Barry: That's right, Kathy. And there is more out there already and really there's so much more to come.

Kathy: This sounds like a lot of fun for seniors, or anyone, but what does it have to do with enabling them to successfully age in place in the homes of their choice for longer?

Barry: That's a fair question. When we talk about success with regard to aging in place we discuss maintaining seniors' safety, health and comfort while doing so. Being connected to the web can play a role in that today and, as we see at CES each year, a growing role in the future.

Some of the obvious safety contributions from the web are the connected monitoring devices that can be used in the home today. I know some seniors don't care for the idea of being monitored at home, but some realize the benefits tradeoff. I think today's monitoring is really just the beginning, though, of better and more acceptable safety measures in the future.

Safety goes beyond monitoring too. We've talked before about thermostats connecting to the web, many with apps that allow distant family members to make sure the setting is right to protect seniors during the summer's heat or the cold of winter. Given the potential impacts of severe weather, the safety potential of something seemingly as minor - - some would even call it a needless toy - - as a connected thermostat it's real.



Health is an area where we've just scratched the surface on the benefits for seniors in connected homes, but even the little that's available now enables many to stay at home longer than they could otherwise. Look at offerings like those from Grand Care Systems and talking dogs from Geri Joy that we've talked about before on the show.

Kathy: There are both health AND safety aspects to both of those.

Barry: That's true, Kathy. And there are more examples today and many more on the way and I mean many.

But let's not overlook the comfort and entertainment aspects of being connected to the web. Our grandparents didn't care to watch TV a lot because well there really wasn't much on it they enjoyed. They loved a lot of the movies from years past, though, and would truly have enjoyed a service like Netflix or Amazon Prime that let them dig deep into libraries and set up favorite lists they could watch any time.

Kathy: They would also have just loved TV if it let them watch videos of their children and grandchildren on the bigger screen whenever they wanted.

Barry: You got that right. Being connected lets them bring YouTube video or video stored on a cloud service right to their screen and not just the little tablet or computer screen but whatever size TV they want to have in the home.

Kathy: Okay, so there are lots of reasons already, and even more in the future, for making sure our senior loved ones' homes are connected to the web and have Wi-Fi. How do we do it and what makes it part of Home Improvement Month?

Barry: Well, Kathy is politely asking me to get to the point. I guess she did let me carry on a bit about tech so I can't get too upset about that.

Wi-Fi for Seniors Homes

I see adding Wi-Fi to the homes of seniors who are aging in place - - or plan to do so it's not just those already doing it - - as a HUGE home improvement because it enables the benefits we discussed and so much more. There's something many of them wouldn't think to do for themselves and probably wouldn't see the benefit when suggested. It's just the type of improvement that would keep proving its wisdom for years to come, though.

How do we accomplish it? The first step is to make sure they have broadband in their home. While some do already, many don't. Sure, it's not available for every home yet but it is for the vast majority. In most communities, especially the larger ones, there is probably competition to provide broadband service from the local phone company and cable providers. In some places local government or major companies have put a system in place to provide access to more at low or no cost. You may even find that your



senior loved one signed up for broadband without realizing it as part of a bundled service package.

Check out the plans that are available and the prices from the different providers. In many areas you can find a package that meets all the needs at a low cost. Shop around even if they do have it in place today, as you might find available greater capability at the same price they are paying or even less, especially if they stayed with a traditional communications provider.

Kathy: Barry, what about using the neighbors' Wi-Fi signal?

Barry: Some people do that with no problem, Kathy, but I wouldn't suggest it. First, even if they're nice and agree, the neighbors' own service may degrade if you use it and theirs put strains on it, it just wouldn't be fair to them. A bigger issue, though, is security. We want our senior loved ones to feel safe doing all their internet browsing, banking and other work online. If the neighbors' service isn't secure - - and if you can attach to it without a password then it's not - - others may jump on with the intent of watching what the seniors do online and end up with access to their accounts and even their identities. This is one area where saving money may be much more costly in the long run.

Getting the broadband to the home is just the first step. The next one is setting up a wireless router in the home and configuring it and the devices in the home.

Kathy: I remember you had lots of fun with that when we first got Wi-Fi.

Barry: Ahh so do I, Kathy, but that was more than ten years ago. Things have gotten so MUCH easier since then. After all, the Wi-Fi equipment makers want to make it easy so more people will buy and use their systems.

Many companies offering broadband service also go further and offer to install Wi-Fi as well - - at a cost, of course, that often includes a lease of the router. Many will say to ignore that and do it yourself, but that is an option you might want to consider. If you or someone else can provide "tech support" for the Wi-Fi system and live close enough to do so then you might want to go with this approach. If not, though, the broadband provider's Wi-Fi likely comes with the support needed to provide a response if service is needed so the additional cost may be worth it to you and even more important, to your senior loved one.

Kathy: Speaking of cost won't broadband and Wi-Fi add to the monthly cost of maintaining seniors' homes?

Barry: Ahh it will for some, and affordability is an issue that many communities are addressing in trying to make it universally available for their residents.

For some seniors, as with those who are younger, broadband and Wi-Fi will actually allow them to reduce the cost of the entertainment they receive while getting access to more content that they really want. Many are able to terminate subscriptions to expensive premium channels and even basic cable or satellite service because all they really want to watch is available through the web. With the amount of available content continuing to grow, more of us will probably do the same in the future.

Kathy: Get more of what you want for less money. There's a novel idea!

Barry: Isn't it, though. Even where it is an added cost, it might be something for which seniors see the benefit once they realize everything it can mean to them. If this is an unaffordable luxury for them on what is already too tight a budget, family members may decide the benefit is worth contributing the service themselves.

After all, it's hard to put a value on the peace of mind that comes from knowing senior loved ones are enjoying living in the home of their choice safely, comfortably and in good health.

Connecting Home Devices to Wi-Fi

I have a couple more points to wrap up our discussion and I'll try to keep on point here since we're running a bit long.

We're not done when Wi-Fi is in place. As part of the Wi-Fi setup, be sure to select secured access and set a password that would not be easy for others on the outside to guess. You may keep a copy of password where you keep your own, just in case it's forgotten by your loved ones when they have to enter it at some point in the future. I know those are easy to forget especially when you don't do it often.

Keep in mind that, for all the work it took to get to this point, you haven't yet done anything that provides loved ones a benefit. Needed work, yes, but now key; the key step is making the broadband and Wi-Fi work for them.

How? Go around and set up each one of their devices to access the Wi-Fi, computers, tablets, smartphones, maybe Blu-ray players, gaming consoles...well, you get the point, you know those devices are out there, make sure you collect them all up. Just remember that everything has to connect to Wi-Fi and have the access password typed-in in order to access the web.

The last step is to show them how to use the web on those devices, at least those that have not yet been connected to the web before. If they have a Blu-ray, game console or even a TV that is web-connected, make sure they know how to access the web using the device. Show them how to access YouTube videos, pay services and other sites because this is an interface that is often very different from what they see on their computer.



I know if our grandparents were still around, I would show them how to access their favorite movies on Netflix or Amazon Prime and family videos on YouTube and YES they would enjoy that.

NOW you've set them up and enabled them to get the benefits available from Wi-Fi in their home. From here, make sure they, you and other family members keep in mind that Wi-Fi is available in the future. This goes beyond when its gift time to when they need connected health devices, home monitoring, smart home systems and the multitude of other devices and services that are part of the promise technology offers to those aging in place.

We're looking forward to sharing all of that with you along the way as well.

Ok, that's enough of the tech talk for now. Kathy, would you please wrap up our show today with your quick tip?

Kathy: I certainly will.

Caring for Dentures

Many of our seniors have dentures and we need to be sure they are caring for them properly so that they avoid mouth problems and difficulty chewing which could lead to poor nutrition. Dentures should be cared for in the same way you care for natural teeth.

Here are some tips to help your seniors care for their dentures:

1. Brush dentures every day.
2. Before brushing, rinse off any food debris.
3. Brush all areas of the mouth including the tongue, gums, cheek and roof of the mouth.
4. Store dentures completely covered in water in a safe place.
5. Be careful handling dentures because if they are dropped over the sink they could break.

Remember good mouth care and denture care will help keep your senior healthy!

Barry: That's a great tip Kathy, thanks! I think that will help a lot of people out and is a good reminder.

That's it for this episode for the Senior Care Corner Show folks. Thank you for joining us. We hope you've enjoyed it and found it informative. Please check out our website for other things you can look at while planning your summer home improvement projects in senior loved ones homes.

And also leave us your thoughts and comments. We'd love to hear from you if you have some ideas on improvements especially that you'd like to share with others. Please leave



a comment on the post or maybe on our Facebook wall at Senior Care Corner or shoot us an email on the Contact page on the website.

And when you're looking around for some of the technology you might want to have connected in the home, be sure to check out the Senior Care Corner Bookstore. We've got some devices out there that come in handy.

And until we see you again, we hope you have a great day!