BILL'S HOME TECH
Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

BILL'S COMPLETE MANUALS

Aging in Place Tech

A room-by-room guide to the lights, locks, sensors and helpers that make staying in your own home safer and easier

A plain-English guide for older adults and the families who love them

Start small, take your time — you can't break it

Written for you by Bill — Bill's Home Tech

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Room-by-room home tech · facts current November 2026

What's Inside

This is your aging-in-place guide. It walks through your home one room at a time — the front door, the living room, the kitchen, the bathroom, the bedroom and the path you walk at night, the stairs, the garage and the yard — and then the safety net that ties it all together: calling for help, gentle check-ins from family, privacy and cost. Read it in any order and at your own pace. You don't need everything in here; most homes need only a few well-chosen pieces. Every idea comes with what it actually does *for you*, and slow step-by-step directions anyone can follow.

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PART 1

Getting Started

What aging-in-place technology is (and isn't), how to look at your home with fresh eyes, and the three foundations everything else stands on. Start here.

CHAPTER 1

A Note from Bill

Hello, and welcome. Whoever is reading this — whether you're planning to stay in the home you love for many more years, or you're a son, daughter or friend helping someone do exactly that — this guide is for **you**.

I'm Bill. Helping people feel at home with their technology is what I do every day, and I've done it for more than 30 years. I wrote this guide the way I'd walk through your house with you: one room at a time, in plain English, pointing out the small, sensible things that make a real difference — and being honest about the things that aren't worth your money.

Staying home is the goal. Gadgets are just helpers.

Most of us want to stay in our own homes as long as we can. Technology can help with that — a light that comes on by itself when your feet touch the floor at night, a doorbell that lets you see who's there without hurrying to the door, a lock that lets the visiting nurse in without hiding a key under the mat. None of it replaces people. It simply takes a few worries off the table so you can get on with your day.

The big promise: you can't break it, and you don't need it all

You can't break your home by trying a smart plug or a motion light. Everything in this guide can be unplugged, undone or returned. And you don't need everything here — most homes are well served by three or four well-chosen pieces. Chapter 24 gives you a simple starter plan in three stages, so you never have to buy more than you need.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this guide does for you

It helps you spot the few changes that matter most in *your* home, set them up calmly, and share them with family in a way that respects your privacy and your independence.

And I'm only a phone call away

If you get stuck, or you'd just like someone to walk the house with you, call me at **(330) 200-8042**. No question is too small, and there's no such thing as a silly one.

So let's take a walk through your home together.

— Bill

CHAPTER 2

What Aging-in-Place Tech Really Means

"Aging in place" simply means living safely, comfortably and independently in your own home as you get older. "Aging-in-place tech" is any gadget or service that helps with that. It sounds like a big, expensive category. It doesn't have to be.

Four jobs technology can do

The job	What it looks like
Light the way	Lights that come on by themselves at night, on the stairs, at the front door — so you never walk in the dark.
Answer the door safely	A video doorbell lets you see and talk to a visitor from your chair, and a smart lock lets trusted people in.
Watch for trouble	Sensors notice smoke, a water leak, a stove left on or a door left open, and tell you or family.
Bring help quickly	A phone, watch, medical alert or voice assistant that can call for help when you can't reach the phone.

Plenty of people your age are already doing this

If you feel late to the party, you're not. AARP's research on adults 50 and older found that use of home-safety devices — things like doorbell cameras and sensors — rose from 19% in 2024 to 34% in 2025. These tools are becoming ordinary household items, like the smoke alarm and the night light before them.

What this guide covers — and what it leaves to the pros

This guide sticks to **technology**: lights, locks, sensors, cameras, voice assistants and ways to call for help. Many of the most important aging-in-place changes aren't technology at all — grab bars, railings, a walk-in shower, better door handles, removing loose rugs. Those are jobs for a contractor or a certified aging-in-place specialist, and they're worth doing. Think of this guide as the electronic half of the plan.

STAY SAFE

Grab bars and railings come first

No gadget prevents a fall the way a sturdy grab bar or stair railing does. A smart light helps you *see*; a railing helps you *stay up*. If your home is missing either, put that at the top of the list and have a qualified installer anchor them properly.

A word about "smart"

You'll see the word **smart** on a lot of boxes. It just means the device connects to the internet or to your phone so it can be controlled from an app, by voice, or automatically. Some of the best tools in this guide aren't smart at all — a plug-in night light with a motion sensor costs a few dollars and needs no Wi-Fi, no app and no account. When a simple tool does the job, I'll say so.

FROM BILL

My honest rule of thumb

Start with the problem, not the gadget. "I'm nervous on the stairs at night" leads to the right answer much faster than "Should I buy a smart home?" Every chapter in this guide starts from a real, everyday worry.

CHAPTER 3

Start With a Walk-Through: Your Home Safety Map

Before buying anything, walk through the house slowly — ideally with a family member or friend — and notice where daily life feels harder or riskier than it should. This twenty-minute walk will tell you more than any store display.

How to do the walk-through

1. Pick a time in the **evening**, when the light is low. Problems with lighting show up best at dusk.
2. Start outside, at the spot where you park or get dropped off, and walk the path to the front door as you normally would.
3. Go room by room in the order of a normal day: entry, living room, kitchen, bathroom, bedroom.
4. In each room, ask the questions in the table below and jot down anything that gets a "yes."
5. Finish by walking the **night path** — from the bed to the bathroom — with the lights off, carefully, with someone beside you.
6. Circle the two or three things that worried you most. Those are where you start.

The questions to ask in every room

Question	If the answer is yes, look at
Is there a moment you walk in the dark or fumble for a switch?	Motion lights, smart bulbs, voice control (Chapters 7, 14 and 16)
Do you hurry to answer the door or the phone?	Video doorbell, voice assistant, cordless phone nearby (Chapters 5 and 8)
Is there anything you worry you left on?	Stove shut-off, smart plugs, reminders (Chapters 10 and 11)
Could you call for help from here if you fell?	Watch, pendant, voice assistant, phone within reach (Chapter 19)
Would family like to know you're OK without calling all the time?	Gentle check-ins (Chapter 20)

TIP

Let the person who lives there lead

If you're helping a parent, let them answer the questions and decide what bothers them. A change they chose is a change they'll use. A gadget pushed on someone usually ends up unplugged in a drawer. Chapter 21 talks about consent and dignity in more depth.

Write down what's already there

While you walk, note what the home already has. It saves money and avoids buying things that won't work together:

- Do you have home **Wi-Fi**, and does it reach every room (try loading a web page on a phone in each room)?
- Is there already an **Amazon Echo**, **Google Nest** speaker, or an **iPhone** or **Apple Watch** in the family?
- What kind of **door lock** and **doorbell** are there now? Is the doorbell wired to a chime?
- Are the **smoke and carbon monoxide alarms** working, and how old are they? (The date is printed on the back.)
- Are there enough **outlets** near the bed, the front door and the TV — or are extension cords already stretched across the floor?

STAY SAFE

Cords across the floor are a trip hazard

Every new gadget wants an outlet. Don't let the fix become the fall. Route cords along walls, use cord covers, or ask an electrician to add an outlet where you need one.

CHAPTER 4

The Foundations: Wi-Fi, Power and One Assistant

Almost every smart device in this guide leans on three things: a dependable internet connection, steady power, and one "home base" app or assistant to tie it together. Get these right first and everything else is easier.

1. Wi-Fi that reaches every room

A video doorbell at the front door or a sensor in the garage is useless if the Wi-Fi doesn't reach it. If phones lose signal in some rooms, the fix is usually a better router placement or a **mesh Wi-Fi** system — several small units that spread the signal through the house. Our guides on home Wi-Fi and mesh Wi-Fi walk through this step by step.

> GOOD TO KNOW
>
> **Write down the Wi-Fi name and password**
>
> Nearly every device setup asks for it. Write the Wi-Fi network name and password on the cheat-sheet in Chapter 26 and keep it somewhere safe. It turns a frustrating setup into a two-minute job.

2. Power that doesn't quit

When the power goes out, Wi-Fi and most smart gadgets go out with it. That's worth planning for:

- Keep a **flashlight** or a plug-in emergency light (it lights up by itself when the power fails) in the bedroom and hallway.
- Smoke and CO alarms should have **battery backup**. Test them monthly.
- A small **battery backup (UPS)** for the modem and router keeps the internet — and any internet-based alert — running through short outages.
- Smart locks run on batteries and keep a **physical key** for exactly this reason. Keep a key.

3. One assistant, one app

Pick **one** system to be the home base, and buy devices that work with it. The three main choices are:

System	In plain words
Amazon Alexa	Echo speakers and Echo Show screens. Strong for voice reminders, Drop In calls between family, and Alexa Emergency Assist (Chapter 19). Uses the Alexa app.
Google Home	Nest speakers and Nest Hub screens, now with Gemini for Home as the voice assistant. Uses the Google Home app. A natural fit for Android families.
Apple Home	Works through iPhone, iPad, Apple Watch and HomePod with Siri. Uses the Home app. A natural fit if the family already uses iPhones.

If the family is already invested in one — say, everyone has iPhones, or there's an Echo on the kitchen counter — start there. Mixing systems works, but it means more apps, more accounts and more to remember.

GOOD TO KNOW

Look for the word "Matter" on the box

Matter is a shared standard that lets a light, plug or sensor work with Alexa, Google Home and Apple Home alike. A Matter device keeps your options open if you ever switch systems. Our Building a Smart Home guide explains Matter in more detail.

Accounts and passwords

Each system needs an account — an Amazon account, a Google Account or an Apple Account — plus an account for each brand of camera or lock. Use a strong, unique password for each, turn on two-step verification, and write them down or keep them in a password manager. If a family member will help manage things, decide now whose account the devices live under. Chapter 20 explains how to share access properly instead of sharing a password.

FROM BILL

Where I usually start

In most homes I start with the Wi-Fi. A strong signal in every room makes every other gadget more reliable, and it helps the TV, the tablet and the phone too.

PART 2

The Front Door & Entry

Seeing who's there without hurrying, letting trusted people in without hiding a key, and never coming home to a dark porch.

CHAPTER 5

Video Doorbells: See Who's There Without Getting Up

A video doorbell is a doorbell with a small camera, microphone and speaker built in. When someone presses it — or even walks up — your phone, tablet or smart display shows you who's there, and you can talk to them from wherever you're sitting.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

No more rushing to the door and risking a fall. No more opening the door to a stranger. You can see the visitor, ask what they want, and decide whether to get up at all — from your chair, your bed, or even while you're away from home.

Battery or wired?

Type	What it means
Battery doorbell	Mounts anywhere with a couple of screws. No wiring. You recharge or swap the battery every few weeks to few months, depending on how busy your door is. Easiest to install.
Wired doorbell	Connects to your existing doorbell wires, so it never needs charging and usually rings your old indoor chime. A good choice if you already have a working wired doorbell.

What they cost

As of November 2026, video doorbells from the big brands (Ring, Google Nest, Blink, Eufy, Arlo and others) run roughly **$60 to $250**. Ring's current lineup, for example, starts at $79.99 for its wired model and $99.99 for its basic battery model, with higher-end models costing more. Sales are frequent.

The subscription question

Most video doorbells show you live video for free. To **save and replay** recordings of who came by, most brands charge a monthly plan — typically about **$4.99 to $19.99 a month**, depending on the brand and how many cameras you have. Ring renamed its plans to Ring Protect in January 2026. Some brands can store video on a memory card or a small storage unit in the home instead of a monthly plan — check the box before you buy. Decide whether you need recordings at all: for many people, simply seeing and answering the door live is the whole point.

Setting one up — the general steps

1. Charge the battery fully (for a battery model) while you install the brand's app on your phone.
2. Open the app, create an account (or sign in), and choose **Set Up a Device** or **Add Device**.
3. Scan the code on the doorbell or its box when asked, and join it to your home Wi-Fi.
4. Mount it at about chest height beside the door, using the bracket and screws in the box. For a wired model, **turn off the power to the doorbell at the breaker first**.
5. Press the button to test it. Your phone should ring and show you the picture.
6. In the app's settings, set the **motion zones** so it watches your walkway — not the busy street or a neighbor's yard.

HEADS UP

If your doorbell wiring is old or unusual

Wired doorbells need the right low-voltage transformer. If the old doorbell hasn't worked in years, or you're not comfortable at the breaker box, have an electrician or a pro install it. It's a short job.

Answering the door from your chair

When the doorbell rings, tap the notification on your phone to see the visitor live. Tap the **microphone** button to talk. If you have an Echo Show or Google Nest Hub, the picture can pop up right on that screen, and you can answer by voice.

Let the doorbell answer for you (Ring Quick Replies)

On many Ring video doorbells, **Quick Replies** plays a short, pre-recorded message to visitors when you can't come to the door — something like "We can't come to the door right now; you can leave a message." The visitor can then leave a short reply for you. Ring's help pages say Quick Replies doesn't need a subscription, though it isn't available on the oldest Ring doorbells.

1. Open the **Ring app** and tap the **menu** (three lines) at the top left.
2. Tap **Devices** and choose your doorbell.
3. Tap the **Smart Responses** tile, then **Quick Replies**, and turn it on.
4. Pick a message and how long the doorbell waits before playing it.

TIP

Make it useful for deliveries

Many people choose a message asking couriers to leave the package by the door. That alone saves a lot of hurried trips to the front step.

Cameras and your neighbors' privacy

Some doorbells now offer face recognition — Ring calls its version **Familiar Faces** — which tells you "your daughter is at the door" instead of "someone is at the door." It's optional. Think it over before you turn it on: it means storing pictures of the faces of people who come to your door. Point cameras at your own property, not into neighbors' windows, and tell regular visitors and caregivers that the door has a camera.

SCAM ALERT

"We're from the gas company" at the door

A video doorbell is your best friend against door-to-door tricks. Talk through the doorbell first. Real utility workers carry ID and the company will confirm the visit if you call the number on *your bill* — not a number they give you. If anything feels off, don't open the door.

CHAPTER 6

Smart Locks & Keypads for Family and Caregivers

A smart lock replaces (or fits over) your deadbolt so it can be opened with a code, your phone or your voice — and still with a key. For aging in place, its real gift is simple: you can let trusted people in without hiding a key under the mat and without getting up.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

The home health aide, the dog walker, the neighbor who checks in and your son can each have their **own code**. You can see who came and went, give a code that only works on Tuesdays, and take a code away in seconds — without changing the locks. And if you ever need help and can't reach the door, emergency responders or family with a code can get in without breaking it down.

Our full Smart Locks guide covers choosing, installing and setting one up in detail. Here are the aging-in-place essentials.

What to look for

- **A keypad** with large, lit buttons. A code is easier than a phone for most visitors.
- **A physical key** backup. Batteries die; keys don't.
- **Auto-lock**, so the door locks itself a few minutes after it closes — no more lying awake wondering.
- **Individual codes and schedules**, so each visitor has their own and you can see who used it.
- Compatibility with your chosen system (Alexa, Google Home or Apple Home) — look for Matter or the logos on the box.

Setting up codes for helpers — the general steps

1. Open the lock's app and find **Access**, **Users** or **Access Codes**.
2. Tap to add a new user or code. Give it a clear name, like "Home aide — Maria" or "Neighbor — Tom."
3. Choose whether it works **always**, on a **schedule** (for example, weekdays 8 a.m. to noon), or only for a few days.

4. Save it, then share the code with that person privately — by phone or in person, not on a sticky note on the door.
5. Check the lock's **history** or **activity** log after their first visit to make sure it worked.

> TIP
> **One code per person**
> Never let everyone share one code. When the aide changes or the neighbor moves, you simply delete their code — everyone else keeps theirs.

Keys for emergencies

Many families also keep a **key lockbox** (a small combination safe for a key) for emergencies. Some local fire departments use a secure key box system on homes where someone lives alone; call your fire department's non-emergency number to ask what they recommend in your town.

> HEADS UP
> **Voice unlocking: be careful**
> Some locks let you *unlock* by voice. If you allow it, always require a spoken PIN — otherwise anyone who can shout through a window could, in theory, ask your assistant to open the door. Locking by voice is fine. Our Smart Locks guide explains the settings.

CHAPTER 7

Lighting the Way In

Coming home after dark to an unlit porch — juggling keys, groceries and a cane — is one of the easiest worries to fix. Good entry lighting is cheap, and much of it doesn't need Wi-Fi at all.

Three simple ways to light the entry

Option	How it works
Dusk-to-dawn bulb	A bulb with a built-in light sensor. It turns itself on at dusk and off at dawn. Screw it into your porch fixture and you're done. No app, no Wi-Fi, a few dollars.
Motion-sensor light	Comes on when someone walks up, then turns off. Great for the walkway, the side door and the garage. Battery and solar versions mount with screws; hard-wired ones are a job for an electrician.
Smart bulb or switch	Can be on a schedule, come on when your phone gets close to home, or turn on by voice ("Alexa, turn on the porch light"). Needs Wi-Fi or a hub. See our Smart Lights guide.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

You never step onto a dark porch again. Steps and the edge of the walk are visible, the keyhole is easy to find, and a lit entry also tells passers-by the home is cared for.

Light the steps, not just the door

Most porch falls happen on the steps, not at the door. Point light **down at the steps**, and consider small solar or low-voltage step lights along the edge of each tread. Bright, even light is better than one glaring spotlight that leaves shadows.

A light that greets you

With smart lights, you can set an automation that turns on the entry light at sunset, or when you arrive. In the Alexa app, Google Home app or Apple Home app, look for **Routines** or **Automations** and choose **sunset** as the starting point. Chapter 14 walks through a routine step by step.

TIP

Inside the door, too

Put a motion night light or a smart bulb just inside the front door, so the hallway lights up the moment you step in. No more feeling along the wall for the switch.

HEADS UP

Outdoor wiring is an electrician's job

Swapping a bulb is easy. Adding a new outdoor fixture, outlet or hard-wired motion light means working with household electricity outdoors — hire a licensed electrician.

PART 3

The Living Room & Everyday Life

A voice assistant that answers from across the room, easy ways to see and hear family, and gentle help with the day's reminders and medications.

CHAPTER 8

A Voice Assistant in the Living Room

A smart speaker or smart display — an Amazon Echo, a Google Nest speaker or Nest Hub, or an Apple HomePod — sits on a table and listens for its name. Say "Alexa," "Hey Google" or "Siri," then ask your question. For aging in place, it's often the single most useful device in the house.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

You can turn on a lamp, hear the weather, set a reminder, call your daughter or ask what time the pharmacy closes — without getting up, without finding your glasses, and without touching a screen.

The assistants in 2026

Assistant	What to know
Alexa+ (Amazon)	Amazon's newer, more conversational Alexa. As of November 2026 it's included at no extra cost for Amazon Prime members; without Prime, Amazon lists it at $19.99 a month, and a limited free version is available in the Alexa app and at Alexa.com.
Gemini for Home (Google)	Google's assistant on Nest speakers and displays. Basic voice help is free. An optional Google Home Premium plan (about $10 or $20 a month in the U.S.) adds extras such as longer camera history and more advanced features.
Siri (Apple)	Built into iPhone, iPad, Apple Watch and HomePod. No separate subscription. Best if the household already uses Apple devices.

Speaker or screen?

A **smart display** — Echo Show or Nest Hub — adds a screen. That's handy for video calls, seeing who's at the door, showing a photo slideshow of the grandkids, and reading a reminder in big letters. A plain **speaker** is cheaper and simpler. For a living room or kitchen, I usually suggest a display; for the bedroom, a speaker is often enough.

Where to put it

- Where you spend the most time — beside your favorite chair, or on the kitchen counter.
- Out of direct sunlight and away from the TV speakers, so it hears *you* rather than the television.
- Within sight, so you can see the light that shows it's listening.
- Consider a second, inexpensive speaker in the bedroom, so help is a few words away at night as well.

Things worth saying

Say this	What happens
"Alexa, turn on the living room lamp."	Works with a smart plug or smart bulb (Chapter 14).
"Hey Google, remind me to call the doctor at 2."	A spoken reminder at 2 p.m.
"Alexa, call Susan."	Calls a contact from your phone's contact list (after setup).
"Hey Google, what's the weather this afternoon?"	The forecast, out loud.
"Alexa, what's on my calendar today?"	Reads your appointments, once your calendar is linked.
"Siri, turn off all the lights."	Works with lights added to the Apple Home app.

HEADS UP

Most voice assistants can't call 911

An Echo or Nest speaker is not a telephone and generally can't dial 911 by itself. Amazon's paid Alexa Emergency Assist connects you to a trained response agent instead (Chapter 19). For real emergencies, keep a phone, a watch or a medical alert within reach.

Our Alexa & Echo and Google Nest & Home guides go much deeper on setup, commands and privacy.

CHAPTER 9

Staying in Touch: Video Calls and Drop In

Loneliness is a real health risk, and seeing a familiar face helps. A smart display can make a video call as simple as saying a name — no phone to hold, no buttons to find.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Your grandchildren can wave hello from across the country, and your son can check in with a quick, face-to-face chat. For the person at home, answering is as easy as saying "Answer."

Calling by voice

On an Echo Show, say "Alexa, video call Mary." On a Nest Hub, say "Hey Google, video call Mary." The person you call needs a compatible device or app — another Echo Show or the Alexa app for Alexa; a Nest display or the Google Meet app for Google.

Drop In: a family intercom — with permission

Alexa's **Drop In** lets a trusted family member connect to your Echo almost instantly, like an intercom, without you having to answer. You'll hear a tone and see a light first. It's a comfort for families who worry, but it should only ever be turned on with the agreement of the person who lives there.

To turn Drop In on or off for an Echo

1. Open the **Alexa app** and tap **Devices**.
2. Tap **Echo & Alexa**, then choose the Echo device.
3. Tap **Communications**, then **Drop In**.
4. Choose who's allowed — for example, only people in your household or contacts you've approved — or turn it off.

You can also choose which **contacts** may Drop In on you, one by one, from the contact's page in the Alexa app. Both sides have to give permission.

STAY SAFE

Drop In is a privacy decision

Drop In can open a camera and microphone in someone's home. Talk about it openly. Many families agree on rules like "only during the day" or "only if I haven't answered the phone." A screen's camera cover or the microphone-off button is always available for private moments.

Photos on the screen

Both Echo Show and Nest Hub can show a rotating slideshow of family photos when they're not doing anything else. Family members can add new pictures from their own phones. It's a gentle way to feel close every day.

CHAPTER 10

Reminders, Medications and the Day's Rhythm

Remembering pills, appointments and the trash day is harder when the days run together. A voice assistant, a phone or a dedicated medication dispenser can take that load off your mind.

Spoken reminders

A smart speaker is a patient, never-tired reminder service. Try:

- "Alexa, remind me to take my blood pressure pill every day at 8 a.m."
- "Hey Google, remind me every Tuesday at 6 p.m. to put out the trash."
- "Siri, remind me to call the pharmacy tomorrow at 10."

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

The reminder arrives out loud, in the room where you are. Family members helping from afar can even set up reminders for you in the app (with your permission).

Phone medication trackers

The iPhone's **Health** app has a **Medications** section that reminds you and keeps a log, and many pharmacies' apps send refill reminders. These are free and private to you.

Automatic pill dispensers

An automatic dispenser is a locked box that releases the right pills at the right time, sounds an alert, and — on connected models — tells a family member if a dose is missed. They suit people with several medications or some memory trouble.

- **Simple, unconnected dispensers** are bought once and filled weekly. They beep and light up at dose time.
- **Connected dispensers** (Hero is one well-known example) usually come with a monthly membership that includes the device and caregiver alerts. Prices and plans change, so ask for the **total cost over a year** and the cancellation terms before you sign up.
- Some Medicare Advantage plans and pharmacy programs help with the cost — ask your plan.

STAY SAFE

Check with the pharmacist

Not every medicine belongs in a dispenser (some need refrigeration, some are taken "as needed"). Ask the pharmacist to look at the list before you fill one, and keep the filling routine with one careful person.

A visible daily schedule

A large-print calendar on the fridge still works wonderfully. A smart display can show today's appointments in big type, and digital "day clocks" that show the day of the week and morning/afternoon/evening are helpful for people who lose track of the day.

TIP

Tie reminders to habits

Set reminders for times you're always in the same place — breakfast, the evening news. A reminder that arrives while you're out in the garden is easy to miss.

PART 4

The Kitchen

The stove left on, the smoke alarm you can't hear from the garden, and the slow leak under the sink — the kitchen's three big worries, and the quiet tools that watch for them.

CHAPTER 11

Stove Safety: Shut-Offs and Reminders

"Did I leave the stove on?" is one of the most common worries families tell me about. Cooking is also one of the leading causes of home fires. The good news: there are devices made exactly for this.

Two kinds of automatic stove shut-off

Type	How it works
Motion-timer shut-offs	A small sensor watches the kitchen. If the stove is on and nobody has been in the kitchen for a set number of minutes, it cuts power to the stove. iGuardStove is one well-known example.
Alarm-listening shut-offs	A device listens for your smoke alarm. If the alarm goes off, it cuts power (or gas) to the stove. FireAvert is one well-known example.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

A forgotten pot can't turn into a fire. For someone with memory changes, it can be the difference between continuing to cook at home and having to give it up. Many models can also text a family member when they shut the stove off.

Before you buy one

- Check whether the stove is **electric or gas**. Electric models typically plug in between the stove and its outlet. Gas models control the gas supply or the stove's electric ignition, and installation should be done by a qualified professional.
- Check the plug: many electric ranges use a large 240-volt outlet. Buy the model that matches yours.
- Look for a safety listing from a recognized testing lab (such as UL or ETL) on the product itself.
- Ask about features: a caregiver lock (so it can't simply be unplugged), a night lock, and text alerts.

HEADS UP

Have a pro install the gas or 240-volt kind

Moving an electric range to reach the outlet is heavy work, and gas connections must never be guessed at. An appliance installer or electrician can install a shut-off safely in under an hour.

Simpler helpers

- **Kitchen timer by voice:** "Alexa, set a 12-minute timer for the eggs." It rings until you answer.
- **Smart plug for small appliances:** put the coffee maker or electric kettle on a smart plug with an automatic-off schedule. (Never use a smart plug on a stove, space heater or anything that heats food unattended unless the plug is rated for it — see our Smart Plugs & Switches guide.)
- **Appliances with auto shut-off:** many kettles, irons and coffee makers now switch off by themselves. Look for it when you replace one.

CHAPTER 12

Smoke, Carbon Monoxide and Water Leaks

Smoke and carbon monoxide (CO) alarms are the most important safety devices in any home. The trouble is that older ears may not hear a high-pitched beep from two rooms away, and an alarm can't tell anyone if you're not home.

The basics, before anything smart

- Fire-safety groups recommend a smoke alarm **inside every bedroom**, **outside each sleeping area**, and on **every level** of the home, including the basement.
- **Interconnected** alarms are best: when one sounds, they all sound — so a fire in the basement is heard in the bedroom.
- Put a **carbon monoxide alarm** outside sleeping areas and on every level if you have gas appliances, a fireplace or an attached garage. Combination smoke/CO alarms are available.
- **Test** every alarm monthly, and replace alarms when they reach the age printed on the back (often about ten years).

Smart alarms that tell your phone

A **smart smoke/CO alarm** does everything a regular one does, plus it sends an alert to your phone — and to family members' phones — when it sounds. Google stopped making its Nest Protect in 2025 and now points people to a First Alert smart alarm that works with the Google Home app. Existing Nest Protects keep working and receiving updates.

Or let your Echo listen

If you have Echo speakers, Amazon's paid **Alexa Emergency Assist** includes **Smart Alerts**: your Echo listens for the sound of a smoke alarm, CO alarm or breaking glass and sends a notification to your phone. Amazon notes it works best when the Echo is in the same room as the alarm and may not recognize every alarm. It doesn't replace a working smoke alarm — it adds a messenger.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

If the alarm goes off while you're out in the garden — or while family is a hundred miles away — someone finds out right away and can call you, a neighbor or the fire department.

Help for people who are hard of hearing

If you can't reliably hear a smoke alarm, ask about alarms or add-on kits with a **strobe light** and a **bed shaker** that vibrates the mattress. These are made specifically for people who are hard of hearing. Our Hearing Help Tech guide has more.

STAY SAFE

Fire departments often help

Many local fire departments and the American Red Cross run programs that install free smoke alarms for residents who need them. Call your fire department's non-emergency line to ask.

Water leak sensors

A leak sensor is a small puck you set on the floor under the sink, behind the toilet, beside the water heater or next to the washing machine. If it gets wet, it sounds an alarm and — on smart models — sends a phone alert. They cost roughly $15 to $40 each, and some brands need a hub.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

A slow drip under the sink is caught in hours, not weeks — before it ruins a floor or creates a slippery puddle that causes a fall. For bigger peace of mind, a plumber can add an automatic water shut-off valve.

PART 5

The Bathroom

The room where falls are most common — and where a little light, the right way to call for help, and a few sensible sensors matter most.

CHAPTER 13

The Bathroom: Light, Leaks and Calling for Help

The bathroom combines hard surfaces, water and tight spaces, so it's where many falls happen. The most important changes here are physical — grab bars, a non-slip mat, a shower seat, a raised toilet seat — and are worth having a contractor do properly. Technology adds three things: light, a way to call for help, and early warning of leaks.

1. Light that's there before you are

- A **plug-in motion night light** by the door and one near the toilet. They come on softly when you walk in at night.
- A smart bulb in the ceiling fixture set to a **dim, warm** level at night, so you're not dazzled.
- Avoid bright, blue-white light in the middle of the night; warm light is easier on the eyes and on going back to sleep.

2. A way to call for help that works in the bathroom

Most falls in the bathroom happen when the phone is in another room. Options that work here:

Option	What to know
Waterproof medical alert	A pendant or wristband made to be worn in the shower. Press the button and a monitoring center answers. Our Medical Alerts & Fall Detection guide compares them.
Smartwatch with fall detection	An Apple Watch or some Android smartwatches can detect a hard fall and call for help. Check the water rating if you plan to wear it in the shower.
Voice assistant nearby	An Echo in the hallway can hear "Alexa, call for help" (with Emergency Assist) through an open door. Don't put speakers where they'll get splashed or steamy.

STAY SAFE

Wear it — especially in the bathroom

A medical alert only helps if it's on you. Many people take it off to shower, which is exactly when it's most needed. Choose one that's rated for the shower and make wearing it part of the routine.

3. Leaks and overflows

Put a leak sensor (Chapter 12) behind the toilet and beside the tub. An overflowing tub or a running toilet is caught quickly.

4. Warm water, not scalding water

Scalding is a real risk for older skin. A plumber can set the water heater to a safer temperature (many recommend about 120°F) and install anti-scald valves. This is plumbing, not tech, but it belongs on the list.

HEADS UP

No cameras in the bathroom

Some families consider a camera to watch for falls. Please don't put one in a bathroom or bedroom. There are better, more respectful options: a medical alert, fall-detecting watch, or motion sensors that report *activity* without video (Chapter 20).

PART 6

The Bedroom & the Night Path

The walk from bed to bathroom in the dark is the most important few feet in the house. Light it, and keep help within reach of the pillow.

CHAPTER 14

The Night Path: Motion Lights From Bed to Bathroom

Think about the trip you make at 2 a.m.: sitting up, finding your slippers, walking to the bathroom, and back. If any part of that happens in the dark, it's the first thing to fix in the whole house.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Your feet are lit before you stand up, the floor and doorways are visible all the way there and back, and you never have to grope for a switch while half asleep. It's inexpensive, and it's one of the most effective changes in this guide.

Option 1: Plug-in motion night lights (no Wi-Fi needed)

These plug straight into an outlet, sense motion and darkness, and glow softly for a minute or so. A multi-pack usually costs well under $30. There's no app, no account and nothing to set up.

1. Walk the night path in daylight and note each outlet along the way: beside the bed, in the hallway, at the bathroom door, near the toilet.
2. Plug a motion night light into each one, low on the wall so it lights the floor.
3. Set any switch on the light to **Auto** (or **motion**).
4. That night, walk the path and check that each light comes on before you reach it. Move any that are late.

TIP

Battery and under-bed lights fill the gaps

No outlet where you need one? Stick-on battery motion lights go anywhere. A motion light strip under the bed frame lights the floor the moment your feet swing down — a lovely first step.

Option 2: Smart lights with a motion sensor

If you already have smart bulbs (see our Smart Lights guide), a wireless **motion sensor** can turn them on at a gentle, dim level at night — and full brightness during the day. Philips Hue's indoor motion sensor, for example, works with its Hue Bridge; Alexa, Google Home and Apple Home all work with a range of Matter motion sensors.

Making a night-light routine in the Alexa app

1. Open the **Alexa app** and tap **More**, then **Routines**.
2. Tap the **+** button to make a new routine and give it a name, like "Night path."
3. Tap **When this happens**, choose **Smart Home**, and pick your motion sensor. Choose **Detects motion**.
4. Tap **Add action**, choose **Smart Home**, pick the hallway light, and set the brightness low — 20% is a good start.
5. If offered, add a time window so it only runs at night (for example, 10 p.m. to 6 a.m.).
6. Save the routine, then test it by walking past the sensor in the dark.

The Google Home app (under **Automations**) and Apple's Home app (under **Automation**) offer the same idea: start when motion is detected, then turn on a light. Menus vary a little between app versions.

HEADS UP

Dim and warm at night

A full-brightness ceiling light at 2 a.m. is jarring and can make it harder to fall back asleep. Set night lights to a low, warm level. You want to see the floor, not light up the house.

Don't forget the trip back

Make sure the lights stay on long enough for the return trip, or that a sensor near the bathroom catches you on the way back. Most motion lights let you set how long they stay on.

CHAPTER 15

The Bedroom: Bedside Controls and Help Within Reach

The bedroom is where you're most vulnerable — getting in and out of bed, waking up unwell, or hearing a noise at night. A few small changes keep light, communication and help within arm's reach.

Light without leaving the bed

- Put the bedside lamp on a **smart plug** and say "Alexa, turn on the bedroom lamp" — or use a small wireless remote button on the nightstand.
- A **touch lamp** (tap anywhere on the base) is a simple, non-smart alternative for people with stiff fingers.
- A voice command like "Hey Google, turn on all the lights" is reassuring if you hear a noise downstairs.

A charging spot for the phone and watch

Make one place on the nightstand the "charging home" for the phone, watch or medical alert. A charging stand that holds the phone upright means you can see the time and answer a call without hunting for it. Keep the cord tidy and off the floor.

> **TIP**
>
> **Keep the phone within reach — not across the room**
>
> The phone charging in the kitchen is no help after a fall in the bedroom. If you don't wear a medical alert or watch at night, at least keep the phone on the nightstand.

Waking up gently

A smart speaker can wake you with soft music or the news. Smart bulbs can brighten slowly before your alarm, like a sunrise. For people who are hard of hearing, a **vibrating alarm** under the pillow or a watch that taps your wrist works well.

Help within reach of the pillow

Option	What it does
Voice assistant on the nightstand	With Alexa Emergency Assist, "Alexa, call for help" reaches a trained agent. Without it, "Alexa, call Susan" reaches family (Chapter 19).
Medical alert by the bed	Keep the pendant on, or at least on the nightstand. Some in-home systems include a wall button for the bedroom.
Watch with fall detection	If worn to bed and charged at another time of day, it watches overnight too.

STAY SAFE

Bed rails and transfer poles are not tech, but they matter

If getting in and out of bed is hard, ask a doctor or occupational therapist about a bed rail or transfer pole. Getting the right one installed correctly matters more than any gadget.

PART 7

Stairs, Hallways, the Garage & Outside

The places in between — stairs, hallways, the garage door and the walk to the mailbox — where good light and a few alerts go a long way.

CHAPTER 16

Stairs and Hallways

Stairs deserve special attention. You want them lit from top to bottom, with a switch (or a sensor) at both ends, so you never start up or down in the dark.

Lighting the stairs

- **Motion lights** at the top and bottom of the stairs, so the light is on before your foot reaches the first step.
- **Stair or tread lights** — small battery or low-voltage lights along the edge of each step — make each edge easy to see.
- A **smart switch** in place of the stair light switch can turn the lights on by voice, on a schedule, or from a motion sensor. Many smart switches need a **neutral wire** in the wall box; our Smart Plugs & Switches guide explains.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Every step is visible in both directions, day and night, and you never have to let go of the railing to find a switch.

HEADS UP

Wall switches: hire an electrician if unsure

Replacing a wall switch means working with household current. If you're not confident — or the wiring is old or the box has no neutral wire — have a licensed electrician do it. It's usually a short visit, and they can add a "three-way" setup so there's a switch at both the top and bottom.

Hallways

Hallways benefit from the same motion lights as the night path (Chapter 14). Keep them clear of cords and clutter, and if a long hallway has a switch at only one end, ask an electrician about adding one at the other end or use a battery-powered smart switch that sticks to the wall.

Contrast helps aging eyes

Brighter isn't the only answer. A strip of high-contrast tape on the edge of the top and bottom step, and a light switch plate that stands out from the wall, make edges and controls easier to see.

CHAPTER 17

The Garage

The garage door is the biggest "door" on the house, and one of the most often forgotten. A garage left open overnight is an open invitation.

Know if the garage door is open — and close it from your phone

If your garage door opener is a Chamberlain or LiftMaster model with **myQ**, the myQ app can show whether the door is open or closed, alert you if it's **left open**, and let you close it from your phone. Older openers can often be upgraded with a small add-on controller.

1. Install the **myQ** app and create an account (or use the brand's app if your opener isn't myQ).
2. Follow the in-app steps to connect the opener (or add-on controller) to your Wi-Fi.
3. Open the app's alert settings and turn on an alert for when the door is **left open**. Pick how long — 15 or 30 minutes is common.
4. Test it once: leave the door open and wait for the alert. Then close it from the app.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

No more walking out to the garage in the dark to check. And if you forget, the app reminds you — or reminds a family member, if you've shared access.

Other garage helpers

- A **motion light** in the garage so it's lit the moment you step out of the car.
- A **keypad** outside the garage door is a handy backup way in — keep its code private.
- A **carbon monoxide alarm** in rooms next to an attached garage.
- A **parking aid** — a simple sensor or even a hanging tennis ball — so pulling in is easy.

STAY SAFE

Keep the safety sensors clean

Every modern garage door opener has two small "photo eye" sensors near the floor that stop the door if something is in the way. Keep them clean and lined up, and never close the door remotely unless you can be sure no one is under it.

CHAPTER 18

Outside: Walkways, the Mailbox and the Weather

Getting outside — to the car, the mailbox, the garden — keeps us active and connected. A few tools make it safer.

Walkways and the driveway

- **Solar path lights** along the walk cost little and need no wiring. Choose brighter ones; cheap ones can be very dim.
- **Motion floodlights** over the driveway, and over the back door if you take out the trash at night.
- A **video camera** covering the driveway or back yard lets you see packages, visitors or deer without going outside.

Mail and packages

A video doorbell (Chapter 5) shows when packages arrive. You can ask carriers to leave packages close to the door, and USPS Informed Delivery (a free service) emails you pictures of the letters arriving that day, so you know whether it's worth the walk to the mailbox.

Weather and ice

- Ask your speaker each morning: "Alexa, what's the weather today?" or "Hey Google, will it be icy this morning?"
- Turn on weather alerts on your phone for your town, so winter storm warnings reach you.
- In Portage County winters, a bag of ice melt by the door and a plan for snow removal matter more than any gadget.

TIP

Let a light tell you it's freezing

Some smart home systems can turn a porch light a color, or announce a reminder, when the outdoor temperature drops below freezing — a gentle nudge to watch your step. It takes a little setup; it's the kind of thing I'm happy to do on a visit.

PART 8

The Whole-Home Safety Net

Calling for help, gentle check-ins from family, privacy and consent, what it all costs and who may help pay — and the scams that prey on worried families.

CHAPTER 19

Emergency Help: Choosing the Right Way to Call

Every room-by-room idea in this guide comes back to one question: **if something goes wrong, how does help arrive?** There's no single right answer, but there is a right answer for each person. Our Medical Alerts & Fall Detection guide covers this in depth; here's the overview.

The main options, side by side

Option	Calls whom	Best for	Typical cost
Cell phone kept on you	911 or anyone	People who reliably carry a phone	Your existing plan
Smartwatch with fall detection	911 and emergency contacts	Active people who'll wear and charge it daily	Price of the watch; cellular models add a monthly fee
Monitored medical alert	A 24/7 monitoring center, which sends help	People living alone, or at higher fall risk	Usually a monthly fee
Alexa Emergency Assist	Amazon's 24/7 Urgent Response agents and your contacts	Homes with Echo devices in the main rooms	Monthly or yearly subscription

Fall detection on an Apple Watch

Apple Watch (SE, and Series 4 and later) can detect a hard fall. If you don't respond, it calls emergency services and messages your emergency contacts. Apple says fall detection turns on automatically if the age entered for you is 55 or older; you can check it or turn it on yourself.

1. On the iPhone, open the **Watch** app and tap **My Watch**.
2. Tap **Emergency SOS**.
3. Turn on **Fall Detection**, and choose **Always on** rather than only during workouts.
4. Make sure your **Medical ID** and **emergency contacts** are filled in on the iPhone (Health app).

HEADS UP

No device catches every fall

Apple and every medical-alert company say the same thing: fall detection can't detect all falls. If you can, press the button or speak up. A device that's worn every day beats a better one that stays in the drawer.

Alexa Emergency Assist

Amazon's **Alexa Emergency Assist** is a subscription that lets you say **"Alexa, call for help"** to reach a trained Urgent Response agent 24 hours a day. The agent can send police, fire or an ambulance, and Alexa can notify up to 25 emergency contacts you choose. It also includes the Smart Alerts described in Chapter 12.

- It is **not 911**, and by default Alexa can't call 911 itself — the agent requests help for you.
- It's available in the U.S. You set it up in the Alexa app under **More** > **Alexa Emergency Assist**.
- Amazon launched it at $5.99 a month or $59 a year; check the current price in the Alexa app before subscribing.
- It works only where an Echo can hear you, so it suits homes with Echos in the main rooms.

FROM BILL

My honest advice

For someone living alone, I usually suggest one wearable (a medical alert or a fall-detecting watch) *plus* a phone within reach. Voice assistants are a helpful extra layer, not a replacement for something you wear.

CHAPTER 20

Caregiver Check-Ins Without Hovering

Families want to know Mom or Dad is OK. Parents want to keep their independence and privacy. Good technology can do both: it can tell family that the day is going normally — without anyone watching a camera feed or calling five times a day.

Gentle signals that "all is well"

Signal	How it works
Activity, not video	A motion sensor in the kitchen or a contact sensor on the fridge or front door can show that the morning routine happened. A routine can notify family only if there's *no* activity by, say, 10 a.m.
Smart plug on the coffee maker	If the coffee maker hasn't been switched on by mid-morning, a family member gets a gentle heads-up to call.
A daily "good morning"	A text, a quick video call, or a shared photo each day — technology is just the messenger.
Location sharing on phones	Find My, Google Maps sharing or Life360, by agreement. Our Life360 & Family Location Sharing guide covers this.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Family worries less and calls because they *want* to, not to check. The person at home keeps their routine and their privacy, and help comes quickly if something is genuinely off.

Share access properly — don't share passwords

Each home app lets you invite family members with their own accounts. That way you can see who did what, and you can remove someone without changing everyone's password.

Google Home

1. Open the **Google Home** app and choose your home.
2. Tap **Settings**, then add a **home member**.
3. Enter the family member's email, choose **Admin** or **Member**, and send the invite.
4. They accept the invitation in their own Google Home app.

Apple Home

1. Open the **Home** app, tap the **More** button, and choose **Home Settings**.
2. Tap **Invite People**, enter the family member's Apple Account, and tap **Send Invite**.
3. Choose whether they can control things remotely and whether they can add or edit accessories.
4. Remote access while you're away needs a **home hub** (an Apple TV or HomePod) in the home.

Alexa

Amazon ended its Alexa Together caregiver service in 2025 and now points families to Alexa Emergency Assist, which can notify family as emergency contacts (Chapter 19). Family members can also be added as Alexa contacts for calls, messages and — if both sides agree — Drop In (Chapter 9).

> **TIP**
>
> **Agree on who gets which alert**
>
> Ten alerts a day to five family members is too many; people learn to ignore them. Pick one primary person for routine alerts and keep emergency alerts for everyone.

CHAPTER 21

Privacy, Consent and Dignity

This may be the most important chapter in the guide. Technology in the home of an older adult should be chosen **with** them, not **for** them. The home is still theirs.

Ask first, always

- Explain what a device does, what it records, and who can see it — in plain words, before it's installed.
- Let the person who lives there say no, or "not yet." Revisit the conversation later.
- Start with the least intrusive option that solves the problem: a motion light before a camera, an activity sensor before video.
- Put the agreement in writing if it helps — a simple note of what's installed and who gets alerts.

Cameras: where and where not

Usually reasonable	Usually not
Front door / video doorbell	Bedrooms
Driveway and yard	Bathrooms
Garage	Anywhere the person hasn't agreed to

HEADS UP

Caregivers and visitors deserve notice too

If paid caregivers work in the home, tell them about any cameras or audio. Recording laws vary, and recording private conversations can be against the law. When in doubt, don't record audio, and ask an attorney.

Microphones and voice recordings

Smart speakers listen for their wake word. Every Echo, Nest and HomePod has a **microphone-off** button or switch, and each app lets you review and delete voice recordings. Our Alexa & Echo and Google Nest & Home guides show exactly where.

When memory changes

As memory changes, families sometimes need to take on more. Even then, explain changes simply, keep familiar routines, and involve the person's doctor and any legal decision-maker (such as a health care power of attorney). Dignity matters at every stage.

FROM BILL

How I handle this on a visit

When a family asks me to install something in a parent's home, I explain it to the parent, in their home, in plain words — and I don't install anything they don't want. It's their house.

CHAPTER 22

Budgeting: What It Costs and Who May Help Pay

You don't need to spend a lot. Some of the most useful items in this guide cost less than a dinner out. Here are honest, rough price ranges as of November 2026 — prices vary by brand and change with sales.

Rough costs

Item	One-time cost	Ongoing cost
Plug-in motion night lights (multi-pack)	About $15–$30	None
Smart plug	About $10–$25 each	None
Smart bulb	About $10–$50 each	None (some need a hub)
Smart speaker / smart display	About $40–$250	Optional assistant or premium plans
Video doorbell	About $60–$250	Optional recording plan, about $4.99–$19.99/month
Smart lock with keypad	About $150–$350	Batteries
Water leak sensors	About $15–$40 each	Batteries; some need a hub
Smart smoke/CO alarm	About $100–$150 each	None
Stove shut-off device	Varies widely by stove type	Some have optional alert plans
Monitored medical alert	Equipment often free to about $200	Usually a monthly fee
Electrician / installer visits	Varies by job	—

TIP

Ask for the total cost for a year

Monthly fees add up quietly. Before signing up for anything with a subscription, multiply the monthly price by 12, ask about activation and cancellation fees, and decide if it's worth it.

Who may help pay

Medicare

Original Medicare (Parts A and B) generally does **not** pay for medical alerts or smart home devices. Some **Medicare Advantage** plans include a medical alert or other in-home safety benefits. Call the number on the back of your plan card and ask specifically about a "personal emergency response system" and home-safety benefits.

Ohio's PASSPORT program

PASSPORT is Ohio's Medicaid waiver program that helps eligible older adults stay at home instead of moving to a nursing facility. Its list of services includes a **personal emergency response system**, among others. Eligibility depends on age, care needs and income.

Your Area Agency on Aging

In Portage County, the Area Agency on Aging is **Direction Home Akron Canton Area Agency on Aging & Disabilities** (it serves Portage, Stark, Summit and Wayne counties). It's the place to ask about PASSPORT, home-safety programs and other local help. Main line: **1-800-421-7277**; website: **dhad.org**.

Try before you buy: AT Ohio

Assistive Technology of Ohio (AT Ohio), part of The Ohio State University, runs a lending library of assistive technology devices that Ohioans can borrow and try free of charge — a sensible step before you buy something expensive. Visit **atohio.engineering.osu.edu**.

Other places to ask

- **Veterans:** the VA offers home-safety and adaptive programs for eligible veterans. Ask the VA medical center.
- **Fire departments and the Red Cross** often install smoke alarms free for residents who need them.
- **Long-term care insurance** policies sometimes cover home safety equipment — read the policy or call.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Knowing where to ask can save hundreds of dollars — and a quick call to the Area Agency on Aging often turns up help families never knew existed.

CHAPTER 23

Scams Aimed at Worried Families

Where there's worry, there are scammers. Aging-in-place products attract some especially pushy tricks. Here are the ones to know.

SCAM ALERT

The "free medical alert" robocall

A recorded call says a relative or doctor ordered you a free medical alert device and asks you to "press 1." The FTC has taken action against companies behind these robocalls; the device is rarely free, and the goal is your credit card or bank details. Hang up without pressing anything.

SCAM ALERT

"Medicare will pay for your new device"

Callers claiming Medicare is offering free equipment — and just need your Medicare number to "confirm" — are fishing. Medicare doesn't call out of the blue to sell or give devices. Never give your Medicare number to a caller you didn't phone yourself.

SCAM ALERT

Door-to-door "safety inspections"

Someone at the door says the smoke alarms, gas line or water heater must be inspected or replaced today. Talk through the video doorbell, don't let them in, and call the utility or fire department at a number you look up yourself.

SCAM ALERT

Fake tech support for your camera or doorbell

A pop-up or caller says your camera has been "hacked" and asks for remote access or payment in gift cards. Real companies don't do this. Close the pop-up, hang up, and call someone you trust.

Good habits that stop most scams

- Buy from brands and stores you know, and set up accounts yourself or with a trusted helper.
- Never pay with gift cards, wire transfers or cryptocurrency for anything to do with your home or health.
- Be wary of any offer that's "today only." A real deal will still be there after you've talked it over with family.
- When in doubt, hang up and call back at a number you find yourself — on a bill, a card or the company's official website.

FROM BILL

Call me before you sign

If someone is pressing you to sign up for a monitoring service or a home-safety package, I'm glad to look it over with you first. A second opinion takes the pressure off.

PART 9

Putting It All Together

A simple plan in three stages, an honest word about when a hand is worth it, and a one-page summary to keep by the phone.

CHAPTER 24

A Starter Plan in Three Stages

You don't have to do it all at once. Here's a sensible order that most homes can follow. Do Stage 1 this month. Add more only when there's a real reason.

Stage 1: The essentials (little or no Wi-Fi needed)

- Plug-in motion night lights along the night path, in the bathroom and at the top and bottom of the stairs (Chapter 14).
- Working, tested smoke and CO alarms on every level and by the bedrooms (Chapter 12).
- A dusk-to-dawn bulb or motion light at the front door (Chapter 7).
- A phone or wearable that can call for help, kept on you or within reach of the bed (Chapter 19).
- Grab bars and railings installed by a professional — not tech, but first on the list.

Stage 2: A few smart helpers

- Strong Wi-Fi in every room (Chapter 4).
- One smart speaker or display in the main living area, and perhaps one in the bedroom (Chapter 8).
- A video doorbell so you never hurry to the door (Chapter 5).
- Smart plugs on the lamps you use most, so they can be turned on by voice (Chapter 15).
- Leak sensors under the sinks and by the water heater (Chapter 12).

Stage 3: For more support

- A smart lock with individual codes for helpers (Chapter 6).
- A stove shut-off device if forgetting the stove is a concern (Chapter 11).
- Gentle check-in signals for family, agreed together (Chapter 20).
- A monitored medical alert or Alexa Emergency Assist for extra backup (Chapter 19).
- Stair, hallway and garage upgrades, with an electrician where needed (Chapters 16 and 17).

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

You fix the biggest risks first, for very little money, and every later step builds on the last instead of starting over.

TIP

Review the plan every year

Needs change. A good time to walk the house again is each fall, when the clocks change — the same day many people test their smoke alarms.

CHAPTER 25

When to Call Bill

I've written this guide so you can do a lot of this on your own. But part of being helpful is being honest about when a hand saves time, money or worry — so here's my straight advice, with no pressure.

Times it's well worth a call

- **The walk-through.** A second pair of eyes on the evening walk-through in Chapter 3 often spots the easy wins.
- **Wi-Fi that doesn't reach** the front door, the garage or the bedroom. I can test and fix the signal so everything else works.
- **Setting up the assistant and routines** — the night-path lights, reminders, Drop In, and Emergency Assist — and showing everyone how they work.
- **Sharing access with family the right way**, with each person on their own account.
- **Helping a parent from afar.** I can set things up in the home while you join by phone or video.
- **Knowing what needs an electrician or contractor** — I'll tell you honestly, so you hire the right person.

What working with me is like

I come to your home, here in Portage County, or help remotely, and I work at your pace — no rushing, no talking down, and no selling you gadgets you don't need. I explain what I'm doing in plain words, and I'll always tell you when something isn't worth your money. That's been my way for more than 30 years.

FROM BILL

How to reach me

Call **(330) 200-8042** or book at **billshometech.com/book**. My help is **$49 remote · $99 in your home**. This guide is free to read and share.

GOOD TO KNOW

You may meet Sophie

When you call or visit billshometech.com, you might be greeted by **Sophie**, my AI receptionist. She can answer quick questions and help you book a time. A real person — me — does the actual help.

Thank you for letting me walk through your home with you. Take it one room at a time, and remember I'm only a phone call away.

— Bill

CHAPTER 26

Your Aging-in-Place Cheat-Sheet

The whole guide, boiled down. Print this page and keep it by the phone.

Room by room, the one thing to do first

Where	First step
Front door	Light the steps and the door; a video doorbell so you never hurry to answer.
Living room	A voice assistant within earshot of your favorite chair.
Kitchen	Tested smoke alarm; a stove shut-off if forgetting is a worry.
Bathroom	Grab bars, a motion night light, and a way to call for help that's worn in the shower.
Bedroom	Phone or alert within reach of the pillow; a lamp you can turn on from bed.
Night path	Motion night lights from the bed to the bathroom, dim and warm.
Stairs	Lit top and bottom, a switch or sensor at both ends, a sturdy railing.
Garage & outside	Left-open alerts on the garage door; path lights and motion floodlights.

Write it down once

Keep handy	
Wi-Fi name & password	_____
Home app / assistant we use	_____
Who gets alerts (primary)	_____
Medical alert company & phone	_____
Smart lock codes given to (names only)	_____
Smoke alarms last tested	_____
Area Agency on Aging	Direction Home · 1-800-421-7277

When something's wrong, in order

1. An emergency: call 911 from a phone, press your medical alert, or say "Alexa, call for help" if you have Emergency Assist.
2. A gadget stopped working: check that it's plugged in and the Wi-Fi is on, then unplug it for 10 seconds and plug it back in.
3. A light or routine won't respond: try it from the app; if that works, the routine needs a look.
4. A strange caller or visitor: don't press keys, don't open the door — hang up or talk through the doorbell, and call family.
5. Still stuck: call Bill at (330) 200-8042.