



Living at home, not just residing.

A GUIDE FOR CARERS AND THEIR
LOVED ONES

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Hello!



Dear readers,

If I have learned one thing during the time I have spent caring for and supporting others, it is this: **Care often begins gradually – and suddenly demands everything.**

It's not always big decisions that make everyday life easier: A light that turns on automatically. A grab rail. A seat in the shower. Or simply the certainty of knowing who to call in an emergency.

This brochure is for people who care. Because today more than ever, we depend on care working at home:

- Because there is a shortage of carers,
- because many care places are no longer affordable and there are far too few of them,
- Because many older people want nothing more than to continue living in their own homes. They often don't need 24/7 care, but rather individual support and age-friendly living arrangements.

With these tips, I would like to show you what is already possible in terms of care and support at home – often with little effort but with a big impact. Because there are already concepts, tools and ideas out there, but they are far too invisible.

Some of these solutions involve digitalisation and automation – solutions that may sound unfamiliar. I often hear people say that humans cannot be replaced by 'cold' programmes and apps. That is true – but the point is that **the alternative is no or only poor care and support.** My appeal: **Stay open to new ideas** – in many countries, digital concepts such as e-healthcare are already well established in the market because there are simply no other solutions in remote areas.

Do you have any feedback, experiences or questions? Then feel free to write to me at anja@sbc.co.at. All the best for you and your family,

Kind regards

Anja Herberth
Founder SmartBuildingsCompass.com

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

What you can expect in this brochure

These 10 tips are based on experience, discussions with organisations and companies, everyday observations and answers to the question: **"What really helps to keep the home a safe and dignified place?"** Each chapter is dedicated to one area and how we can make life easier – for older people and those who support them.

1. People like to stay at home - when it is safe

Practical home adaptations that prevent accidents and promote independence.

2. The best helpers for everyday

Everyday companions that provide relief and support.

3. When technology becomes empathetic

What AI and smart tools can do in everyday care.

4. Those who move stay alive

Exercise and activity are key to preventing withdrawal and loneliness.

5. Carers also need help

Tips on how relatives can look after themselves – and find support.

6. You don't have to manage it all by yourself.

How to build up a strong network of neighbours, friends and professionals.

7. At home in the countryside - and well cared for

What rural regions need to make care work.

8. When summer becomes dangerous

The underestimated danger: Heat protection for older people

9. Travelling safely

Our checklist: How to make travelling with caring needs a success.

10. Plan while you can

Why good preparation makes life easier – and what questions you should ask early on.





1. People like to stay at home - when it's safe

Practical home adaptations that prevent accidents and promote independence.

How small changes at home can give you independence

A home is more than just a roof over your head – it is the place where we want to feel safe and secure. But as we get older, even small steps or door thresholds can become real trip hazards. The good news is that many of these hazards can be eliminated with little effort.

- **Today's renovators think threshold-free: Avoid steps and thresholds**

Steps are often a "design element" in architecture – but in old age, even small edges as low as 1 cm can be dangerous trip hazards. Therefore, make sure that all transitions are thresholdfree during renovations and construction.

Ideally, there should be no steps between rooms or at the entrance to the home. Retrofitting ramps and flat transitions (also available from 3D printers) or stair lifts can help overcome obstacles.

- **Good lighting ensures orientation and well-being**

Good lighting is often the simplest and most effective measure for improving safety and quality of life, as the eyes need more light and contrast as we age. Motion detectors, night lights and warm white light promote safety and a healthy day-night rhythm.

- **Designing bathrooms as a risk-free zone**

There is hardly any room in the home that is as dangerous for older people as the bathroom: moisture and slippery tiles make it a real trip hazard. The solution: a walk-in shower, non-slip flooring or mats – ideally with enough space to accommodate a shower stool or rollator in the shower. Grab rails provide safety, while a raised toilet makes it easier to stand up.

If mobility is limited, brushes can also help with showering – e.g. toe brushes that attach to the shower floor with a suction cup. Extended brushes help with washing the back and can be held independently for longer – even in the bathroom.

- **Remove trip hazards**

What looks harmless can quickly become dangerous in everyday life: Loose carpets, cables and objects on the floor are common causes of accidents. Clear, unobstructed paths and non-slip floors in important areas such as the kitchen, bathroom and entrance area increase safety.



How small changes at home can give you independence

- **Space for movement with a rollator**

A rollator is a practical companion – but it significantly changes the amount of space required. Minimum door widths (~80 cm) and turning areas are necessary. Make sure that those affected can reach the work surfaces like stove and sink in the kitchen and that the toilet can be used easily.

There should also be enough space between the bed and the wall. Sufficient freedom of movement determines whether everyday activities such as washing or going to the toilet can be carried out independently.

- **Doors and access points: easy to open**

Opening heavy doors becomes increasingly difficult with age. People with limited strength, arthritis, walking disabilities or who use walking frames need doors that can be opened easily and intuitively. Lightweight, easy-to-grip sliding doors are a good alternative here. Instead of classic knobs, long handles or bow handles are recommended, as these are easy to grip even with limited hand function or fine motor skills.

- **Place everything within easy reach**

Mobility declines with age – bending, stretching and balancing become more difficult and risky. This makes it all the more important that everything you need on a daily basis is easily accessible. Switches, sockets and cupboard contents should be positioned at a comfortable height and be easy to reach to reduce physical strain.

Things that are used less frequently can be stored higher up or lower down.

- **Use technology discreetly**

Technology is good when it doesn't stand out, but simply works. Often, simple, everyday solutions are enough to make a difference. Motion and light sensors (also available batteryoperated and easy to stick on or fix in place), timers for blinds and emergency call systems work in the background and increase safety without adding complexity.

- **Create quiet spots in everyday life**

Strategically placed seating – in the hallway, kitchen or garden – allows for short breaks and makes everyday life easier for those with walking difficulties. Make sure that the seating is stable, easy to reach and equipped with armrests (to make it easier to stand up).



2. The best helpers for everyday

Which everyday companions provide relief without taking up much space or requiring technology.

Which everyday aids provide relief

In everyday life, it is often the little things that make a big difference. Modern everyday aids are now inconspicuous but effective. They provide support, structure and orientation, and also give carers security and support. Many of these products are available on the market, but are still not very visible. Here is a selection of the wide range of options that are already available today.

Make sure that the solutions support independence rather than reducing it. Once something has been forgotten, it cannot be learned again.

01 Automatic reminders

They help to make everyday life safe and reliable – whether by reminding you to take medication, go to doctor's appointments or keep other commitments. Drinking reminders are particularly useful in the hot summer months. Implementation: As an app on a smartphone, as a simple tool that works without an app, via voice assistants such as Amazon Alexa, or as a smart medication dispenser that reminds you at the right time and automatically releases the tablets.

02 Cutlery and crockery for seniors

Shaky hands, limited strength or uncertainty when gripping can spoil the enjoyment of cooking and eating. But there are simple aids that can change that: Teller G cups with high rims and non-slip bases ensure that nothing slips. Cutlery G Chef's knives with a stable, thicker grip zone and soft feel lie securely in the hand. Bowls with a sloped base automatically direct liquids towards the mouth – ideal for eating with one hand. Drinking cups with handles or spouted cups encourage independent drinking. These aids are not only practical – they also give a sense of independence, dignity and enjoyment of food.

03 Emergency call/alarm systems & localization

A fall, a dizzy spell, a sudden moment of weakness: emergency call systems offer a valuable safety net in such situations. Emergency call buttons worn as a bracelet or necklace send a signal to relatives, neighbours or an emergency call centre at the touch of a button. They work at home or, depending on the model, also on the go with GPS tracking. Modern emergency call watch models/smartwatches automatically detect a fall and trigger an alarm if the wearer does not respond.

Many models can also track the wearer's location. Please note: To avoid false alarms to emergency call centres, it is often sufficient to simply connect with neighbours and relatives.

Which everyday aids provide relief

04

Smart door functions

Smart doorbells, locks and security cameras show who is at the door and help you maintain control over access to your home, even if you have limited mobility. Access can be flexibly granted or restricted – for example, for mobile care services or neighbours. Make sure you choose a secure model with a quality seal.

05

Voice assistants

Whether it's turning on the lights, playing music or reminding you to take your medication, voice assistants such as Amazon Alexa, Google Assistant or Siri do exactly that – on command. They can be a valuable support in everyday life for many older people, especially if they have limited mobility, visual impairments or difficulty using a mobile phone or tablet. Depending on the system, regional services, calendar functions and favourite radio stations can be personalised. Voice assistants are also a helpful source of information for everyday life and answer questions such as: What's the weather like? What's on the news today?

06

Activity games & memory training

Exercise and mental stimulation are like vitamins for the brain – especially in old age. Just a few minutes a day can help improve concentration, memory and zest for life. Whether classic board games, crossword puzzles, digital memory trainers, game apps or movement games with music: anything that is fun and challenging keeps the brain active. Memory training apps not only provide variety, but also promote concentration and mental fitness in an intelligent way. And those who play together also strengthen social contacts and self-confidence.

07

Communication systems for the whole family

When family members live scattered across cities or countries, it becomes even more important to stay in touch easily and regularly. Communication systems such as video calls, group chats and digital family calendars enable older people to feel connected and informed. There are already easy-to-use products for seniors that enable communication without technical stress. Whether with a tablet on the kitchen table, a voice assistant or special devices for seniors with large displays, digital proximity can complement real proximity. And when Grandma is virtually present at dinner, for example, everyday life suddenly becomes a little more shared again.



3. When technology becomes empathetic

How smart tools and AI support everyday care without overwhelming users.

When technology assists care

Technology can be cold and complicated – or warm, understandable and supportive. And especially in times of care shortages and a lack of skilled workers, one thing is clear: Technology cannot replace people, but it can provide targeted support for existing care and improve safety. So that living in old age remains safe, comfortable and independent.

Modern assistance solutions that are specially tailored to older people, care staff and family carers work with smart sensors and AI-based systems. They now offer much more than just emergency calls or reminders: these solutions are linked to form an intelligent overall system. They run in the background without attracting attention and route the information from the sensors to where it is needed.

Critical situations are detected, for example, by a fall sensor, and a response tailored to the individual user is triggered: Neighbours are alerted, or the next of kin are contacted. When connected to care services, carers can adjust their route planning: they can see on a dashboard who needs their help urgently and respond more quickly to negative developments. Health status is better monitored and negative developments can be identified at an early stage. This means that illnesses are detected more quickly – and a faster response is possible.

Artificial intelligence could also achieve what has not been possible to date: the networking of highly diverse areas in homes and buildings. AI does not care what it controls – energy flows, assistance and alarm solutions, or shading. An automated system can optimise the environment quickly and without our active intervention, better than we ever could. And it saves money – without compromising on comfort – because resources are used more efficiently.

AI recognises patterns – and deviations

What makes artificial intelligence so special is that it creates connections, recognises patterns and learns as it goes along. The system detects deviations in everyday life, responds individually to residents' needs and thus helps to identify changes at an early stage, such as a deterioration in mobility or health.

Thanks to sensor-based monitoring and AI analysis, health is not fragmented but understood as a process – a comprehensive view that complements rather than replaces. The goal is clear: to live longer, safer and more independently at home, with technology and AI acting as trusted companions. And all this without complicated controls or technical expertise: often, a simple voice command or an easy-to-use app is all it takes. Important: Always consider data security, focus on secure product solutions!



Picture: Shutterstock

4. Those who move stay alive

Why regular exercise, fresh air and small activities are so important.

Those who move and are active stay alive

Exercise and activity: Cornerstones of vitality, health and overall well-being. Not only do they strengthen the heart and muscles, they also promote mental clarity and social interaction.

In old age, too little exercise and activity become a risk factor. The lack of social interaction means that certain areas of the brain receive less stimulation, which can also impair cognitive performance in the long term. Scientific studies show that loneliness significantly increases the likelihood of dementia and Alzheimer's disease. Social isolation also has a negative effect on the immune system and increases the risk of chronic diseases such as high blood pressure and diabetes.

Regular exercise and activity stimulate the circulation, lift your mood and encourage social interaction. Loneliness is not inevitable: accept help or offer your support to those affected.

1. Small steps count

Even a quick chat while shopping or a walk around the neighbourhood can be a start. Closeness often begins with a smile.

2. Stay connected digitally

Tablets and smartphones make it easier to keep in touch with family and friends, even over long distances. Ask neighbours and family members to help you set up these devices.

3. Living together instead of alone

New forms of living such as multi-generational houses, senior citizens' shared flats or assisted living promote everyday encounters.

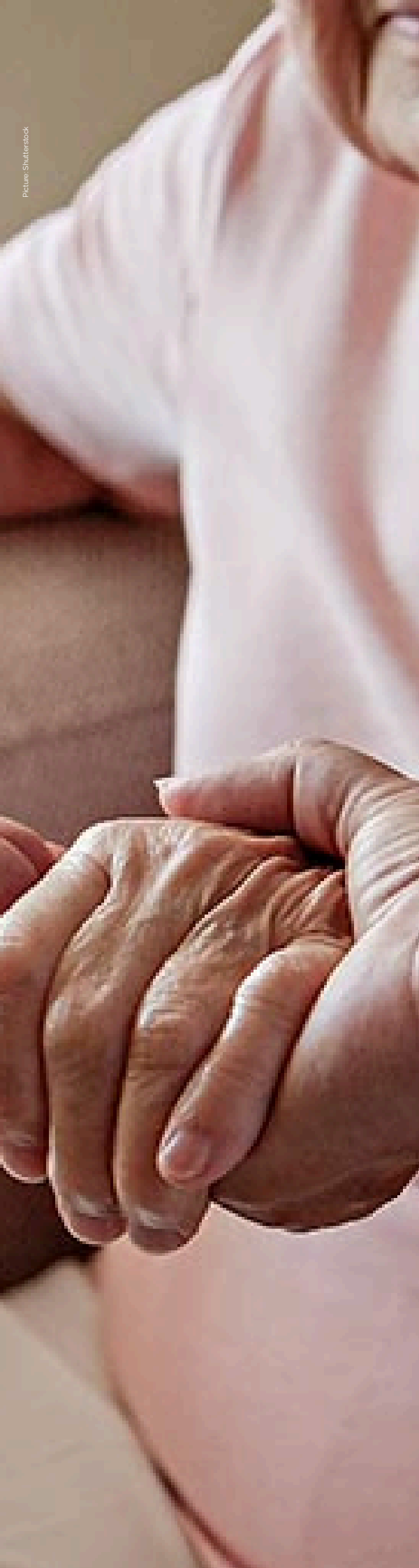
4. Share activities with others

Meet up at the neighbourhood café, pensioners' club, singing group, sports club or volunteer organisation: people who share interests often find friends quickly.

5. Get help when you need it

Mobility is often key to participation. Many communities offer transport services or carpooling schemes – simply ask if these services are available in your community or ask neighbours and friends if they can help you!





Picture Shutterstock

5. Caregivers need help too

How family carers can take good care of others - without forgetting themselves.

Caregivers also need help

Caregivers give a lot – often more than they realise. Family members who care for older people juggle many roles at once: they are daughters or sons, partners, carers, organisers, emotional support – and, last but not least, they are often exhausted themselves. Caring for people with neurological conditions such as dementia can be particularly stressful: everyday life changes gradually, demands increase – and there is often little time left for one's own needs.

Recognising this is the first important step. **After all, good care is only possible if carers also take good care of themselves.** Family carers often perform superhuman tasks – day in, day out, with little sleep, many worries and hardly any recognition. But even the strongest people need support sometimes. Emotional exhaustion, feelings of guilt, being overwhelmed and feeling inadequate are widespread – but rarely discussed. Yet this is precisely what is so important: not forgetting yourself. Because only those who remain emotionally stable can provide loving support in difficult times. Seeking help is not a sign of weakness – it is a sign of responsibility.

Where to find help and relief

Psychological support, discussion groups or even just honest exchanges with other people affected can work wonders. They help you to put your own experiences into perspective, set boundaries and draw new strength. Day centres or day care are also a valuable anchor here. They give older people structure, community and joie de vivre – while at the same time creating space for relatives to take a breather, recharge their batteries or simply organise their everyday lives.

Innovative projects such as supervised holiday offers for people with dementia and their relatives show that help is also possible in particularly challenging situations.

The most important message remains: Those who help can – and should – also accept help. No one has to go down this path alone. Help is available – and it can, indeed must, be used. Because only those who take good care of themselves can be there for others in the long term.





6. You don't have to manage it all by yourself.

How to build a reliable network before things get tough.

The network: A lifeline for everyday life

Those who start building a trusted network early on have a better chance of remaining independent in their own homes for longer. This includes not only family and neighbours, but also contacts in the community, associations, mobile services and volunteers. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness, but a wise move if you want to continue living in your own home. Having a strong network around you makes many things easier – and enriches your life.

It doesn't always require round-the-clock care, seven days a week. Instead, it requires support that evolves with individual needs. What can help here is a network of "caring neighbourhoods" – a community that actively involves and supports people who need assistance.

Whether through dedicated associations, volunteers or simply a neighbour lending a hand with shopping. Or entire cities, as in the case of Bruges, which are consciously creating dementia-friendly and age-friendly spaces. Every form of participation strengthens not only those in need of care, but also those who are there for them every day: their family carers. Those who start building their personal support network early on are better equipped – not only organisationally, but also emotionally.

The network can take many forms:

- Family members who share tasks, such as doctor's appointments, paperwork or accompanying you to therapy sessions.
- Neighbours and friends who help with cooking, run errands or are simply there to talk.
- Professional care and support services that provide regular or occasional help.
- Day centres, day care, self-help groups, social counselling services or local initiatives that offer relief and guidance. Find out what associations and support options are available in your area.

Many services – whether public, charitable or private – are available, but often not very visible. A call to the local council, a visit to social services or a chat with other people in a similar situation can open doors.





Picture: Shutterstock

7. At home in the countryside

What care in rural areas needs and where to find support.



At home in the countryside – and well cared for

Living in the countryside means home, peace and community. But it also brings challenges: fewer care services, long distances and often noticeable gaps in provision. Local authorities are under pressure to maintain basic services. But now there are innovative solutions that address precisely these issues. Our appeal: if your region decides to focus more on digitalisation, then go for it. Because even if there is a lot of resistance to technology, the alternative is, in the worst case, no care or support, or insufficient care and support.

01

Smart organised network of helpers

It now takes more than just a village to raise a child. Help from neighbours is also becoming increasingly important in care. In communities, this coordination often still takes place using Excel lists. A much smarter option would be to let those affected organise it themselves.

Apps such as Flexhero and Hub4Help enable volunteers and people seeking help to connect digitally. This makes it easy to coordinate tasks such as shopping, accompanying someone to the doctor or providing minor everyday assistance. Some of the apps already work like Uber: supply and demand manage themselves, and some solutions even include integrated billing for services. This reduces the burden on local authorities and improves everyday support for those affected.

02

Telemedicine und digital health services

Video consultations and digital monitoring enable medical advice without long journeys. This not only relieves the burden on doctors and nurses, but also reduces the need for patient transport – a particularly critical issue in remote areas. And given the long waiting times for doctor's appointments, this may even mean that help reaches those affected more quickly.

Incidentally, telemedicine is already being used in many parts of the world: in Australia and Canada, for example, where the nearest hospital is hundreds of kilometres away. Neurological diseases, diabetes, heart disease, etc. are monitored remotely, and in an emergency, a rapid response is triggered and help is sent.

03

Age-friendly renovation

As described in detail in chapter one, age-appropriate, barrier-free renovation is an important step, especially for older, historically grown building structures.

At home in the countryside – and well cared for

04

Care Apps

... are digital assistants that offer functions such as medication reminders, care planning, documentation, appointment management and direct communication with care services, for example.

One example from Austria is the HerzensApp, which was developed specifically for family carers. It makes it easier to coordinate everyday care, enables communication within the family or with professional carers, and helps to organise care needs in a structured way.

05

Smart care assistance

Intelligent sensors can now reliably detect emergencies such as falls. These systems are becoming increasingly affordable and simpler: nowadays, all that is required is to screw sensors to the ceiling, which are then analysed by AI.

This enables care organisations to optimise route planning, meaning that people who need help receive it sooner. This also allows them to work with fewer staff despite a shortage of skilled workers and enables short-term care support even in regions with limited resources (e.g. after operations).

06

eGovernment & digital applications

In many communities, basic services such as post offices, banks, insurance companies and grocery stores are often no longer available. Digital applications can help to close these gaps. These applications vary from country to country, but it is worth checking them out: communities often already rely on apps such as "Gem2Go", which deliver the latest information directly to mobile phones.

Banking apps also allow transfers to be made from home. Administrative procedures can be carried out digitally via the Digital Office or, for example, through ID Austria – from registration forms to voting cards.

For successful implementation, it must be clear that digital solutions require more than just the purchase of end devices. Older people in particular need training, simple user interfaces and personal support when getting started.



8. When summer becomes dangerous

Why heat affects older people – and how to protect yourself easily.

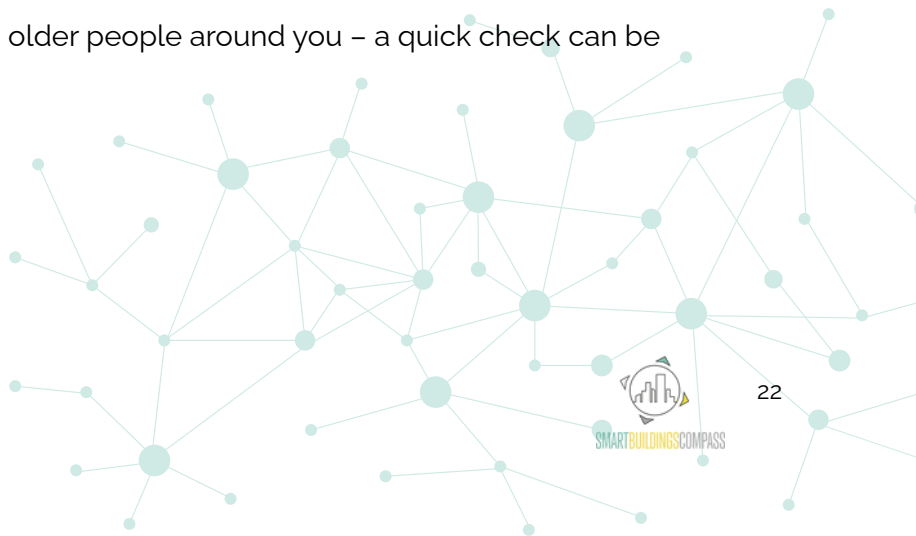
When summer becomes dangerous

When temperatures rise, it is not only unpleasant for many older people, but also potentially dangerous. This is because, as we age, our bodies lose their ability to adapt effectively to heat: we feel less thirsty, sweat less and our cardiovascular system is put under greater strain. Chronic illnesses and medication can also reduce our tolerance to heat.

With timely preparation, adapted daily routines and digital support, older people can also enjoy the summer safely.

- **Keep living spaces cool:** Keep roller blinds closed during the day and allow for good ventilation. Mobile fans or air conditioners can provide additional support.
- **Don't forget to drink – even if you're not thirsty:** 1.5 to 2 litres of fluid a day, preferably water or unsweetened tea. Drinking reminders can help.
- **Plan your activities wisely:** Do physical activities in the early morning or evening, and stay indoors or in the shade during the midday heat.
- **Check your medication:** Hot temperatures can affect the effectiveness of medication, and some active ingredients have an impact on how the human body perceives heat. Consult your doctor to find out if this applies to you.
- **Take warning signs seriously:** Dizziness, headaches, nausea, unusual tiredness or concentration problems can be signs of heatstroke. Cool down immediately, drink and seek medical help if necessary.
- **Use technology wisely:** Smart blinds keep rooms cool, while care and health apps and voice assistants such as Alexa provide weather information, reminders and emergency assistance.

On hot days, pay particular attention to older people around you – a quick check can be crucial in an emergency.





Picture: OEBB, Harald Ebenberger

9. Travelling safely

Our checklist: How to make travelling with care needs a success.

How to travel successfully with care needs

A barrier-free holiday does not begin at your destination – it starts with the right preparation. Planning ahead and paying attention to special needs avoids stress and creates space for true relaxation. With a little foresight, your holiday will not only be more relaxed, but also more comfortable and carefree. Our tips will help you:

- **Determine your personal needs**

Plan what is really needed: "Barrier-free" does not automatically mean "wheelchair accessible". If you are travelling with mobility aids, you should check carefully whether entrances, bathrooms and paths are suitable – and also consider issues such as medication storage. Good planning reduces stress and creates space for genuine relaxation.

- **Choose your accommodation carefully & travel planning**

Look for accessible or wheelchair-friendly hotels – AirBnb, Booking.com and specialised websites provide detailed information. Look for ground-level access, wide doors, lifts and accessible bathrooms. Reviews from other travellers with similar requirements are often helpful.

Use online tools such as Wheelmap.org or Google Maps for accessible locations, AccessibleGO for wheelchair-accessible hotels and HandicapX for accessible toilets. Regional platforms such as urlaub-barrierefrei.at or reisen-fuer-alle.de offer additional support.

- **Organise accessible travel**

For flights and trains, there are services that accompany you through check-in and security to your seat. These must be booked at least 48 hours in advance, so arrive early to allow for sufficient time. When booking, please also remember to include any accompanying persons and assistance dogs.

- **Plan your admission and sightseeing cleverly**

Book tickets in advance and find out about accessible entrances and exits. Let them know about your needs when you book online or at the entrance to avoid any hassle and long waits.

Travelling with limited mobility is possible today with good planning and the right aids. A comprehensive checklist is available at [SmartBuildingsCompass.com](https://www.smartbuildingscompass.com).





10. Plan while you can

Why it's a relief to talk about care, living arrangements and wishes in good times.

Planning - and having a say

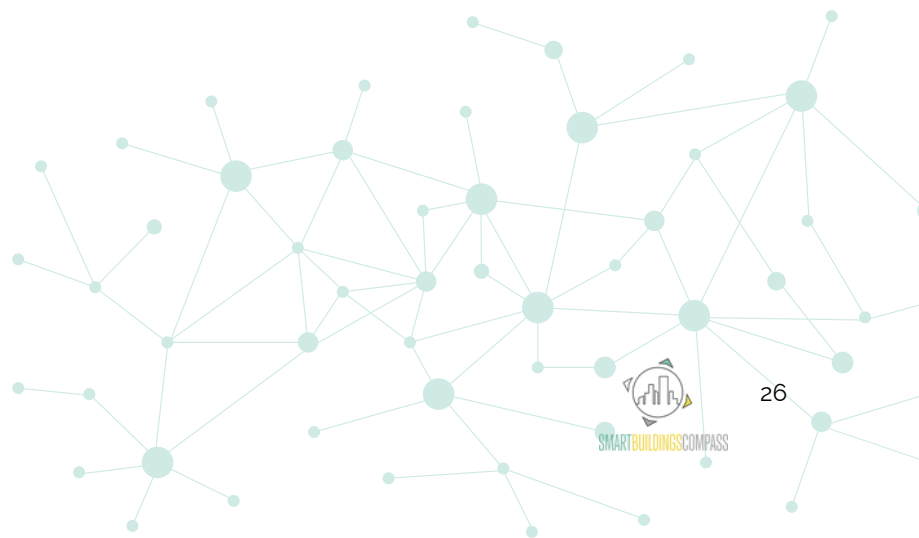
It's a conversation that many people put off – yet it's one of the most important in life: How would I like to live when I can no longer manage on my own? What kind of support would I like? And who should make decisions in an emergency?

Discussing care, living arrangements and your own wishes at an early stage is not a sign of weakness, but of foresight and self-determination. After all, those who think about these things early on relieve others of the burden of making difficult decisions in acute situations – and retain their own influence and autonomy.

When an accident, illness or sudden need for care arises, there is often no time to think things through calmly or gather the right information. A timely discussion with family, trusted individuals or experts makes it possible to openly discuss wishes: Do I want to live at home for as long as possible? Is assisted living an option? Are there specific care wishes or things that I cannot imagine at all? What support services would be helpful? What does my budget allow?

Organisational issues such as power of attorney, living wills and financial planning are also part of this. Dealing with these issues in good time not only provides clarity, but also emotional relief – for yourself and your loved ones. Good preparation gives you security and often peace of mind: once the questions have been answered, there is more room to live in the present.

It is not about talking yourself into a crisis – it is about not fearing it. Those who know and communicate their wishes can look to the future with more serenity and confidence in old age. Because good care begins with good preparation. And it begins long before help is actually needed.



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