What's app? | Smartphone technology can help make your life less complicated

Want to make your life easier? There's a smartphone application, or app, for that. In fact, there are probably a lot of apps for that.

There are apps to help you manage your medications. There are apps to magnify small print and light up dark menus. There are apps that save money on prescriptions. There are apps to order rides, get food delivered or virtually visit your doctor.

Apps make it easier to stay fit and connect with loved ones. Having trouble keeping tabs on your bank account? There's an app for that too. There are literally millions of apps online ready to be downloaded. And some can really make your life easier.

"I just got a new phone," says Sister Jacquie Dewar, RSM, who lives at Mercy Circle, a retirement community in Chicago. The screen is already loaded with app icons. Dewar likes the Walgreens app to manage her medications. The Citibank app keeps track of her accounts. She uses the bar code scanner while grocery shopping to quickly retrieve product information.

Google Maps helps her find the nearest Dairy Queen, a favorite stop. The calendar keeps her on track all day long. "I live by it," says Dewar, a former elementary school teacher who also helped to start a clinic for the poor in North Carolina. "I'm always checking what's next."

Tech territory

Young people aren't the only ones regularly checking their phones. Older people rely on their smartphones too.

An AARP survey shows that 81% of people aged 60 to 69 have smartphones. And 62% of those age 70 and older use smartphones.

A big benefit of having a computer in your pocket is that it can help make life easier, especially as we age.

Take, for example, Medisafe, an app that provides medication reminders. The app has more than 10 million users. The app can handle complicated dosing schedules as well as simple reminders for "as needed" medications. You can also track all of your family's medications, including your pets.

Alice Keane likes the MyChart app that links her to her doctors. She can send a message to her care team, view test results, and get reminders about upcoming appointments.

"It's easy," says Keanne, who lives at Smith Village, a retirement community in Chicago. She adds that she just bought a new car that can be started from the app on her phone. Her favorite app is Duolingo, which is making it easier for her to learn Spanish. "I always liked learning languages," she says.

Another handy app is GoodRX. It allows you to compare the prices of medications. Enter your zip code and the name of the drug. The app displays the cost of the medication at nearby pharmacies. For example, a recent search brings up eight local pharmacies for a month's supply of the popular heartburn medication Prilosec with prices ranging from $9 to nearly $40. The app also offers coupons.

Transportation plus

Can't drive or don't want to? The Uber and Lyft apps can be used to request a ride from a nearby driver. The apps allow you to track the driver's arrival and pay for the ride through your phone. Uber has added a feature that lets family members order a ride for a senior who doesn't have a smartphone, or is unfamiliar with the app.

Bike enthusiast Bruce Miller makes his trips easier with Ride With GPS, a bike route planner and cycling navigation app. "It's Google Maps on steroids," says Miller, a retired IT executive who lives in Evanston. He was recently using the app to create a cycling trip from Minneapolis to Escanaba, Michigan. The app allows users to imbed content such as points of interest and photos.

Typically our smartphones are loaded with photos, and some are actually print worthy. Snapfish makes transferring to print simple. Users can upload photos to make cards, albums, calendars and even personalized pillows and blankets.

Video calling apps, such as FaceTime, make it easy to see friends and family. The video-sharing app TikTok, so popular with young people, has a growing number of "granfluencers" — older people whose videos are followed by millions.

What would we do without Google? Rich Misiorowski lives at Smith Crossing, a retirement community in Orland Park. When he dines with friends, he keeps his smartphone handy to easily settle disputes or fact check the conversation. A recent question: How many counties are there in Illinois? The answer: 102 counties, the seventh largest number of counties among the 50 states. "Every evening at the table there is an argument about something. I pull out my phone and give them the official Google answer," he says.

With this increased use of technology, are you tired of forgetting your passwords? Fed up with changing your password because you forgot the old one? There's an app for that too. LastPass is a password management app that offers a secure place to store your passwords. Never be locked out of your accounts again.

Many apps are free but some may also have a premium version that has a monthly subscription fee.

Sister Jacquie Dewar has several apps on her new smartphone, including finding the nearest Dairy Queen.