



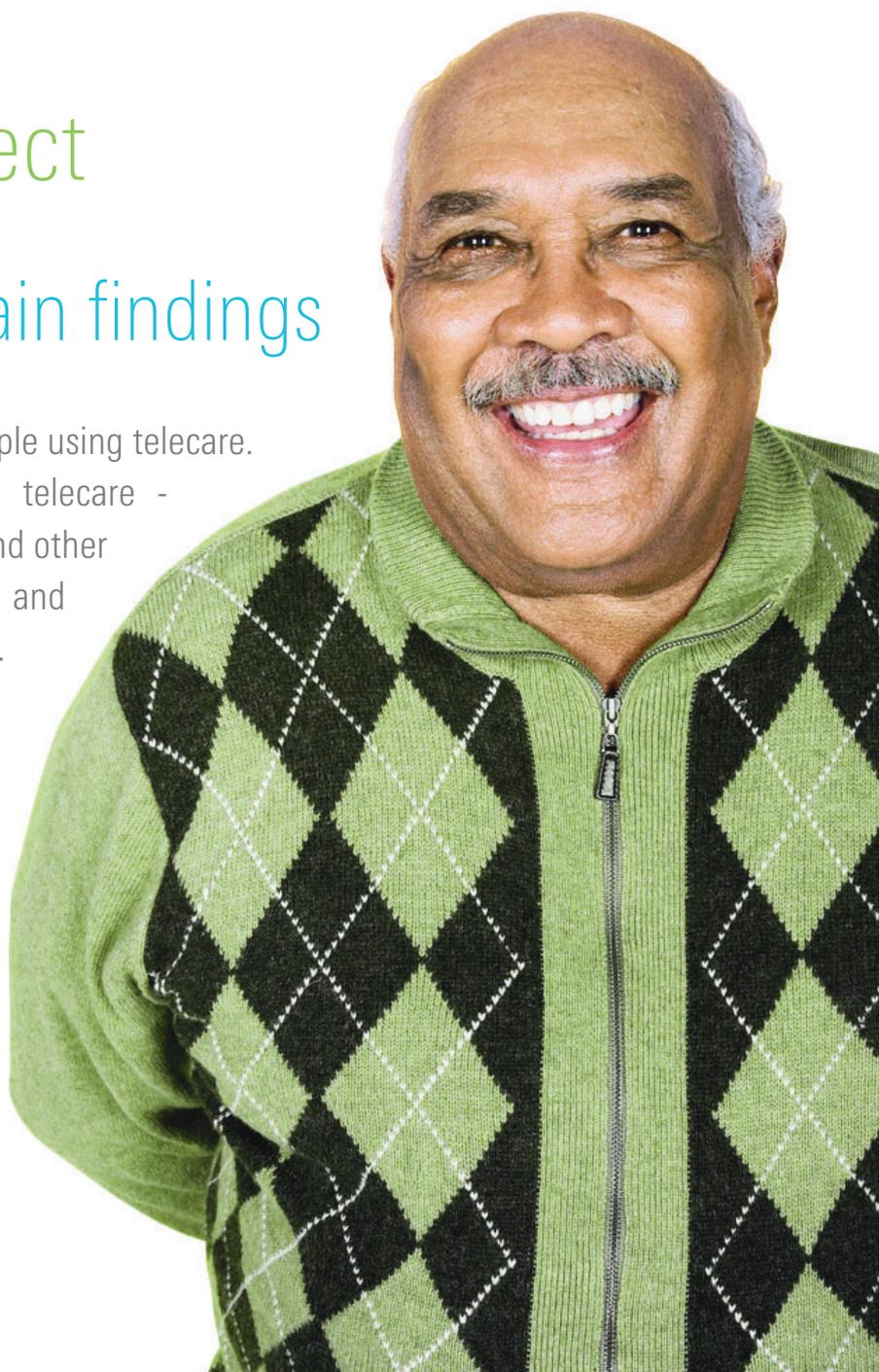
Advancing Knowledge of Telecare for Independence and Vitality in later life

The AKTIVE project

Summary of our main findings

The AKTIVE project was about older people using telecare. It focused on how they experienced telecare - pendant alarms, sensors in the home, and other devices linked to a monitoring centre - and what they felt about having this support.

In 2012-13, a team of researchers at the Universities of Leeds and Oxford visited older people using telecare over a period of 6-9 months to talk about their lives, experiences, thoughts and feelings. This leaflet outlines some of the things they found.



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Feelings about telecare

We asked people what they felt about telecare.

Most people were positive about some things about telecare. For them, telecare meant:

- It would be easier to get help in an emergency
- They felt safer at home
- They felt less alone and more connected to other people
- They could still do things they'd otherwise have to give up, like gardening or cooking
- Their relationships with other people, such as their children and grandchildren, were better
- Their relationships with local friends or neighbours (often their 'named responders') were stronger.

Many people also felt telecare helped their families, carers, friends and neighbours. The team interviewed some of these people as well. They told us that telecare helped them too, by:

- Settling some disagreements about safety
- Giving them peace of mind, so they could still have a 'life of their own'
- In some emergency situations, friends or family had been able to activate the pendant alarm and stay with the older person, rather than leave them alone while using the phone to call for help
- Some liked the way the telecare monitoring centre was able to let other family members know what was happening in a crisis.

Sixty people aged over 65 who had some form of telecare in their homes were visited at least 4 times over at least 6 months. Half used only a pendant alarm; the others had other equipment, including smoke detectors, bogus caller alarms and GPS tracking devices. We visited 39 women and 21 men, of whom over half were widowed and 41 lived alone. Most said there was someone they could ask for help if needed.

My daughter thinks it's wonderful and everything, because she said, 'I used to worry myself to death about you.' She worries about me, but not like she used to.

Mrs Thompson , 72, living alone

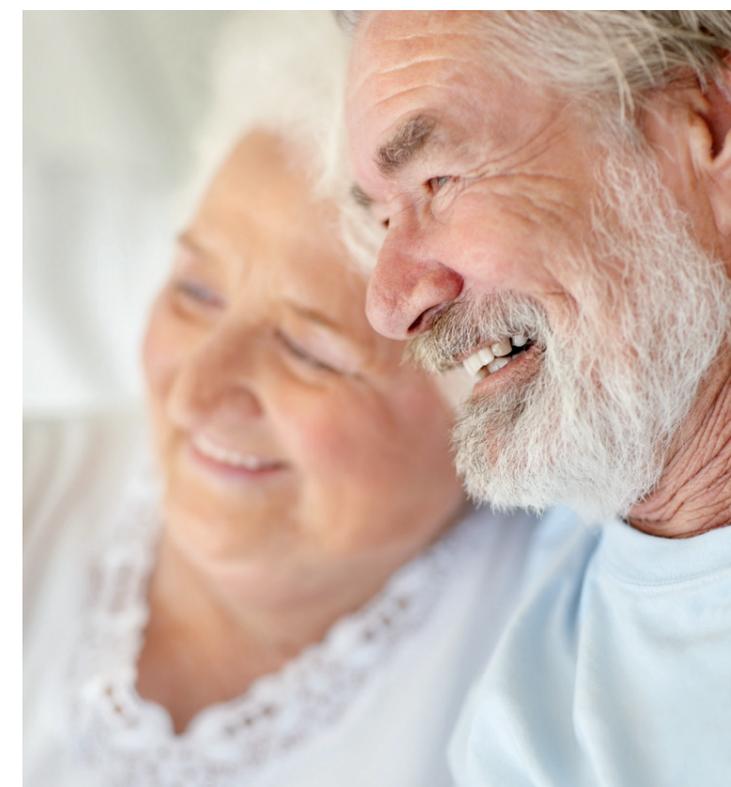
Some people in the study also disliked certain aspects of their telecare. They told us:

- Equipment could sometimes be difficult to use
- They weren't sure how the equipment worked – some felt it had not been explained well (or at all) or demonstrated to them
- More frequent reassessment would have been helpful
- Installation of additional equipment would have been welcome
- They did not know what to do if the equipment went wrong
- They found false alarms or alerts distressing or embarrassing
- They disliked the look or feel of devices which they needed to wear
- Some people who were charged for telecare found waiting to be financially assessed and being unsure what it would cost worrying.

Friends and family members also sometimes found telecare hard to use and understand, especially when information provided was limited.

In the study, the researchers also spoke with older people about their earlier lives, their thoughts, feelings and attitudes about using telecare, and other aspects of their everyday lives.

On the following pages we summarise our findings about how they had adjusted to changes, their relationships with others, and in some cases loneliness, and how they felt about themselves as they grew older.



Coping with change

Many older people we spoke to had experienced some changes in recent years. These included losing their spouse, moving to a smaller home, or developing health problems. Changes in health meant some people now found some activities more difficult. Quite often this made them feel unhappy or powerless.

I'm just finding it very difficult to wind down and I want to do things that I did before [...] I'm having to accept being old [laughing] and not being able to do these things. I know I can't.

Mrs Robinson, 77, living alone

Doing things they had previously enjoyed made them feel good, but needing help with things they had once found easy could be upsetting.

I do a lot of cleaning myself. I get my duster out, but it's not like being able-bodied ... It keeps you occupied as well, it keeps you active. I wouldn't like to be like a zombie and not doing anything.

Mr Hodgkins, 70, living alone

Some said it was hard to know what help was available to support them when ill or living on their own. However quite a few said telecare helped them continue with some activities when their health was poor, and that it reassured their friends and families that they could do this safely. At first, some people with new health problems found it hard to adjust to telecare or other equipment they now needed, such as a walking frame. But over time, most began to see that telecare and other help could be useful.

Telecare helped people in the study to continue doing some tasks in and around their homes. Some said they felt safer wearing a pendant alarm and were careful always to wear it when doing DIY or gardening.

I think just wearing it tells me not to fall over. I think the great thing about the pendant is that it makes me remember that I'm not very steady on my feet. Ever since I had the emergency button I haven't had a fall. I think I go more carefully. I think I go very carefully.

Mrs Hall 77, living alone

Relationships and loneliness in later life

Two-thirds of the older people we spoke to lived alone, like 4 million other older people in the UK. Most of those we visited were widowed.

It's very difficult [...] when you've got to start looking after yourself and doing things for yourself. I've never had to do it; my wife was always here, and if I wanted anything, my wife was here. When I got really bad she would look after me. But once she'd gone, I was completely lost. I didn't know where to start.

Mr Shaw, 73, living alone

Living alone while getting older, or living with someone who has health problems caused some people concern about how to get help in a crisis or to have feelings of loneliness.

I get very, very lonely - and nobody can understand loneliness unless they've been there themselves. Kids, they've got a life of their own now, I suppose; they've got enough to do.

Mrs Allen, 84, living alone

Many people in the study needed some help with shopping, cooking, cleaning, gardening and housework. How they organised this, or were helped by others, varied a lot. Some had quite complex arrangements involving family members, friends and people paid to help (for example a home care service, a cleaner or a gardener). Others had support mainly, or only, from one or two family members or friends. A few paid for almost all their help and support.

Some people found loneliness was a problem, especially if their health made it difficult for them to get out and see other people. It was especially hard for those people who had lost their spouse or close friends. Telecare helped some of these people feel less alone, as they knew help was available if they needed it.

If anything happens, you're not on your own, you can just press the button and somebody will come.

Mrs Tyne, 94, living alone

Ageing, changes and how people felt about themselves

Changes in health and in relationships made some people reflect on how they felt about themselves. Some people spoke about being very independent, providing care for younger family members, working hard and having a lot of hobbies when they were younger.

I never thought I'd be like this, but my daughter said, 'Well, mum, you are 90, really'. But I don't feel it, you see? That's the trouble; I don't feel it, and I'll talk to people just as if I'm the same as them, but I'm not, you see?

Mrs Richards, 93, living alone

Many found these activities they had enjoyed or valued more difficult as they got older or their health became poor. Some felt they 'weren't themselves' any more. Needing to use and wear their telecare devices could add to this – these were things they wouldn't have chosen in the past.

Other people felt that telecare, walking sticks and other aids were useful in helping them remain independent and stay in their own homes, even though they did not look as attractive as they would like.

People say, 'Would you like some help now?' At first it was difficult to accept, but once you realise that it starts to open up a different way of looking at things and giving you back a bit more, rather than taking it away. That's thanks to the pendant as well. I mean, even going out today, I went into town, I didn't worry too much because I knew that if my husband had a bad turn he could just call them. Again, that gives you that little extra, and although you think it's taking your independence away, because you're asking for help, what it's actually doing is enabling you to do more, when you think about it.

Mrs Swallow, 67, living with her husband

I'd just like to emphasise that I'm very grateful for the equipment and feel as though it's going to help and give me an assurance in case anything happens in the future...it's a consoling thought to know that I've got this. You know before I used to worry and I thought well if I fell going to the toilet or if I fainted in the toilet and I banged my head I wouldn't be able to get back to the telephone.

Miss Chester, 89, living alone.

What did we do with our findings?

The research team have published a series of Working Papers about the findings of the study. We have also held two conferences and discussed our results with telecare manufacturers and service providers.

If you would like a copy of the Working Papers, please contact:

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We'd like to thank you for all your help
and support during the study -

we couldn't have done it without you!



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