

Caregivers Juggle Meds, Meals, Money, and So Much More. Here's How They Stay Organized.

Published February 20, 2026



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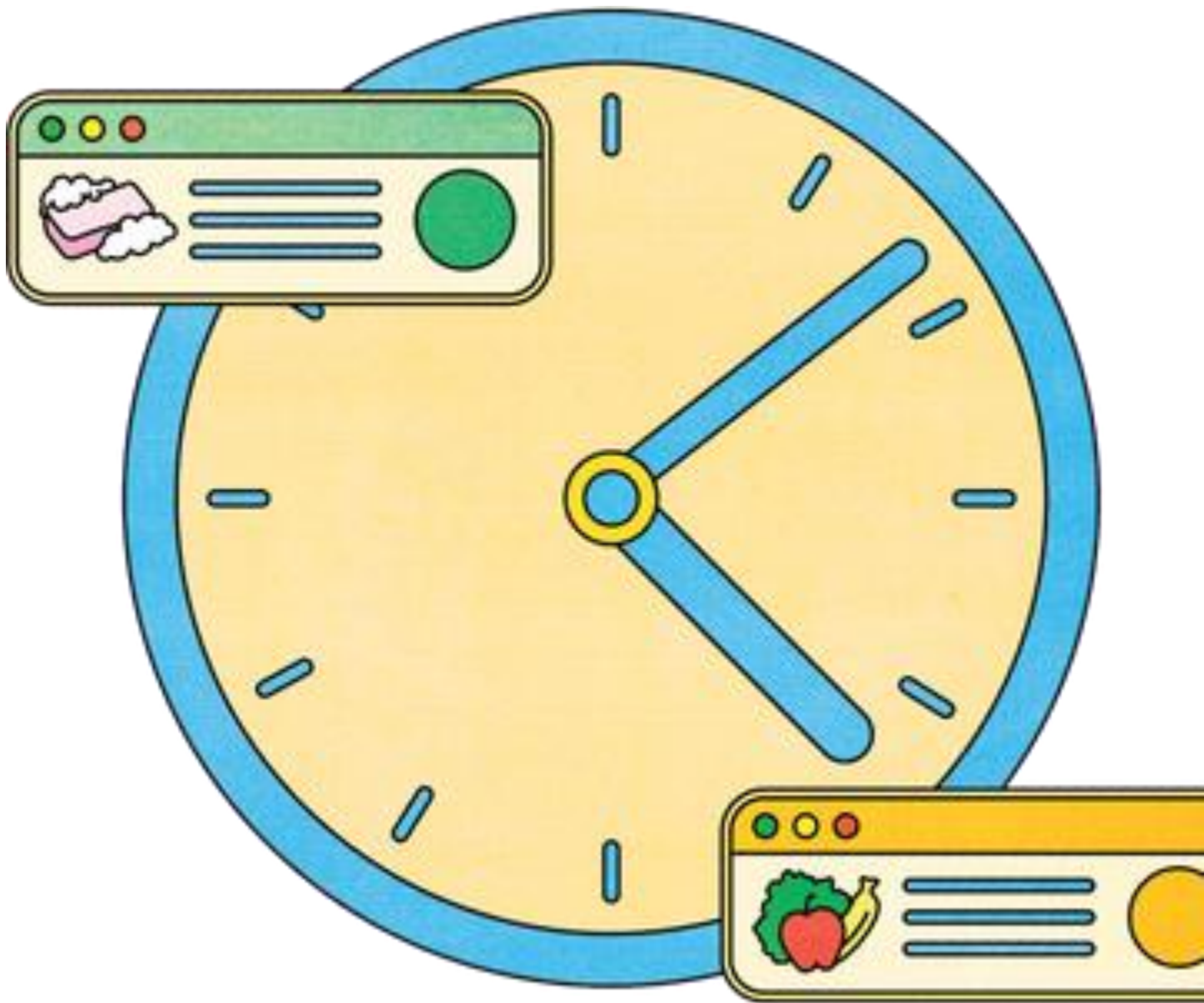
Rachel Cericola is a writer covering smart home. In addition to testing hundreds of smart devices, she has also tested dozens of ice cream sandwiches.

Caregivers face a formidable daily to-do list: cooking, cleaning, medication, appointments, groceries, and questions, always more questions, that need answers. Keeping everything in smooth running order is perhaps the most essential part of the job, for the well-being of both the caregiver and the person they're caring for.

"Being a caregiver can frequently mean sudden changes in plans due to illness, accidents, etc. Being organized makes those instances less overwhelming," said Kat Carney, who lives with and cares for her 84-year-old mother and her 91-year-old father outside of Atlanta. "Another reason it's important is in case something happens to me (big or small), it will be easier for someone to step in without having to reinvent the wheel."

To get an insider's take on the routines, tactics, and products that are proven to work, I spoke to caregivers from around the country and got their input. They all told me that the job involves keeping a lot of plates spinning at once, so organization is everything. Here's their advice on how they do it.

Staying on schedule



The breadth of tasks that a caregiver takes on — organizing and managing appointments, friend visits, medications, meals, physical activity — can be overwhelming.

Writing things down and creating lists is helpful to some, but many caregivers we spoke to have found technology solutions that make it easier to manage scheduling, especially when multiple people need to stay informed.



[A smarter calendar](#)

[Skylight 15-inch Calendar](#)

This touchscreen-based, color-coded digital calendar displays appointments and tasks, and it can sync with family members' and caregivers' own calendars.

[\\$320 from Amazon](#)

[\\$300 from Walmart](#)

[\\$320 from Best Buy](#)

Carney said one of the thorniest issues is not only making a schedule, but making sure her parents are aware of it. "My dad was always asking me, 'What are we doing today? What do I have to do? Who's coming?' I was answering a lot of the same things over and over again." Carney said she found a reliable solution in the [Skylight Calendar](#), a Wi-Fi touchscreen that can be mounted to a wall or sit on a counter.

She likes it because it has a companion app that allows her to easily add or change checklists, chores, tasks, and meal plans, and it keeps them in sync across multiple screens. That way her parents, as well as their caregivers, are always up-to-the-

minute. “Now when my dad asks me something, I just point to the calendar. When the home health aid asks me, I point to the calendar,” she said. “It’s not overtaxing my brain.”



[An aid for people living with memory loss](#)

[Relish Day Hub](#)

This reminder clock helps keep everyone on a set daily routine, with lights, audible alerts, and a clickable to-do list.

[\\$200 from Amazon](#)

While tracking appointments and events was important for Jessica Guthrie, a caregiver and [advocate](#) in Fredericksburg, Virginia, she was also concerned with helping her 77-year-old mom keep track of the days of the week. She found using digital clocks to be a big help. “They were perfect because they kept my mom clear on the actual day and the time of the day — ‘oh, it’s morning time’ — which was so, so helpful,” she said.

Designed for people living with dementia, the [Relish Day Hub](#) includes a daily to-do list to ensure your loved one stays on top of important personal routines, such as brushing teeth, eating breakfast, drinking water, and feeding the cat. Guthrie said she can also set medication reminders for her mom’s caregiver. “Tools like this help bring a sense of normalcy and consistency for people living with dementia

and their caregivers,” she said. “My mom loves it because it helps her stay on top of [things].”

Communication with others



All of the caregivers I spoke with talked about the importance of maintaining clear lines of communication, whether with family members, friends, other caregivers, or medical professionals. Many are fine relying on free online tools, such as [Google Calendar](#) and [Google Docs](#).



[For reminders and video chats](#)

[Amazon Echo Show 11](#)

This smart display has an HD touchscreen and a 13-megapixel camera, and it fits comfortably on a desk, counter, or shelf. It's great for video chats, alarms, and entertainment.

[\\$220 from Amazon](#)

[\\$220 from Best Buy](#)

Carney said getting her mother up in the morning was always a chore. "Like, mom, come on, you gotta get up, come on you've got a doctor's appointment, you've gotta do this," she said. Then, her mom met Alexa. "She gets up when Alexa tells her to get up." Alexa is Amazon's personal digital assistant, which is included in all Echo smart speakers and smart screens. It can be a voice-programmed alarm clock, provide on-demand news and music, display calendars (when using a screen like the [Amazon Echo Show 11](#)), and even [play video with closed captioning](#) (when available).

The Echo Show 11 also has a 1920×1200 touchscreen, a 13-megapixel camera, and a "drop in" feature for two-way video chat with another Echo Show or the Alexa app. And if you prefer to not have a screen, there are several Echo speakers (such as the inexpensive [Amazon Echo Dot](#)) that deliver all of Alexa's features, including

intercoms, alarms, and [Reminders](#) about appointments and medications. “It’s one less thing with me hovering because they’re still my parents and I want them to have their space,” Carney said. “So I put recurring things on Alexa. Alexa is my best friend.”



[A TV-based messaging system](#)

[JubileeTV](#)

This subscription-based system is part home-entertainment control system and part home-monitoring system

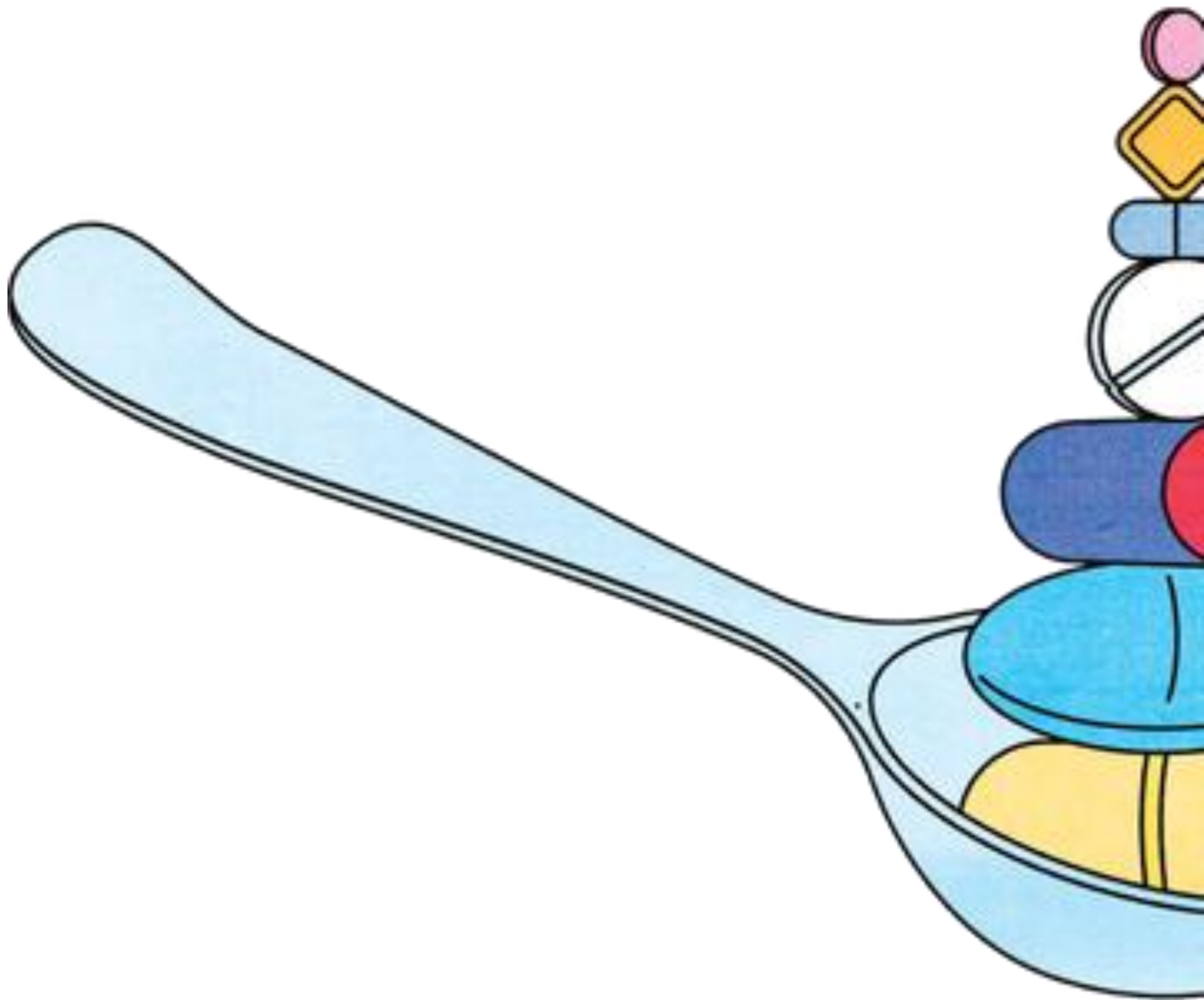
[\\$39 from JubileeTV](#) [\(per month\)](#)

Olivia Wolfe is a nursing intern in southern Arizona, as well as the primary caregiver for her 82-year-old father, who is living with dementia. “Balancing both roles has been eye-opening,” she said. “I’ve learned a lot about organization and the importance of self-care along the way.” She’s also learned to rely on a range of digital tools, like WhatsApp for cross-device texting, a shared calendar for staying on schedule, and a combo home-communication and home-monitoring system using [JubileeTV](#).

JubileeTV allows you to control the TV remotely but also turns it into a big-screen video- and text-communication device that multiple people can be invited to use.

Its control hub mounts on top of a TV and has a built-in camera and microphone, so loved ones can make video calls that are more comfortable than attempted chats with a small smartphone screen (it also makes it possible to troubleshoot tech bugs remotely). It comes with [a large-button, backlit universal remote](#) that also accepts voice commands. A smartphone app makes it easy for family or caregivers to send photos and videos directly to the TV and to beam on-screen text reminders. JubileeTV's required subscription (which includes the hardware) costs \$39 per month, \$389 a year, or a one-time fee of \$789 for lifetime access. "It quietly supports independence while making caregiving more manageable," Wolfe said. "It's one of those tools that doesn't draw attention to itself, but smooths the day enough to make a real difference."

Managing medications



A [report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) found that a third of American adults in their 60s and 70s take at least five prescription drugs on a regular basis. A traditional [pill box](#) is useful up to a certain point but may not meet your needs for more-complex regimens or multiple medications.



[For managing medications](#)

[Hero Smart Pill Dispenser](#)

This app-controlled dispenser reminds you when it's time to take meds and dispenses them on a user-set schedule. It can also keep caregivers in the loop.

[Buy from Hero Health](#)

Carney said she never seemed to have enough time in the day to get everything done, so she started looking at ways to automate some of her care tasks. "One of them was medication management. I was spending an inordinate amount of time counting pills into pill boxes, reminding them to take the pills," she said. "I said there has got to be a better way." Then she found the [Hero](#), a Wi-Fi-enabled medication dispenser.

The Hero dispenser can notify users when it's time to take meds, and it dispenses the correct dose of each medication at the set time. It even tracks the doses taken and sends smartphone alerts to the user and designated caregivers if any are missed. It does require a subscription (\$45 per month with a 12-month commitment), but [we recommend](#) checking to see if your insurance covers medication management or if you can use a flexible spending account (FSA) or health savings account (HSA). "It is brilliant," said Carney.

Clerical assistance



Almost every single caregiver I spoke to said they use some combination of [notebooks](#), [paper planners](#), folders, and binders. Guthrie uses a journal to write down observations and questions to review with the doctor. “There’s now apps to help you do this more seamlessly, but regardless of the tool that you use, you need to use the thing that matches your strengths best,” she said. “This allowed me to have everything tangible in front of me and be able to speak clearly.”



[For faxing sensitive documents](#)

[Documo](#)

This service is a bit expensive, but it meets high-security legal requirements, including those of HIPAA.

[Buy from Documo](#)

Leslie Vick, [author](#) and caregiver for her 85-year-old mother in St. Louis Park, Minnesota, was surprised how many times she's been required to provide hard copies of documents to medical providers — and that many rely on hard-to-find technology. "A lot of medical clinics insist that documents are faxed — you can't email," she said. "I didn't even know there were fax machines anymore." Instead of making room for a fax machine, we recommend subscribing to a service like [Documo](#).

Documo is a subscription-based service that allows you to send and receive quality faxes from a digital device like a phone or laptop. The company's cheapest plan costs \$25 per month, which gives one user a single fax number and the ability to send and receive up to 300 pages per month. The cost also includes HIPAA compliance, which is required for some sensitive documents, such as health forms. It also includes email-to-fax and fax-to-email features, as well as the ability to create PDFs.



Useful list management

Todoist

This app manages lists and documents, sends reminders, and has other features that make managing multiple tasks a breeze.

Buy from Todoist

Dan Kosmowski, who cares for his 79-year-old father in Birmingham, Michigan, says he likes being able to share checklists for caregivers and monitor when tasks are completed. He likes [Todoist](#), an easy-to-use smartphone app that can manage everything from appointments, grocery lists, and questions for the doctor, to invoices, receipts, and other tasks. It also sets reminders, so caregivers know when it's time to refill juice, cut vegetables, change sheets, and do other daily chores. "The caregivers that were more tech savvy could download the app, and then the checklist would regenerate," he said. That means Kosmowski and any other caregivers can keep track of what's being accomplished, but they also don't have to create a new task list for each day.

Todoist has free and paid plans, with the latter adding additional list options, calendars, custom reminders, an unlimited activity history, an AI assistant, and more, starting at \$5 per user per month (or \$60 per year). It's compatible with Apple, Android, Windows, and Linux, as well as automation programs like Zapier and IFTTT.



[For creating and keeping a budget](#)

[Moneydance](#)

This software can organize personal finances and keep track of bills on a variety of platforms, including Mac, Windows, Linux, iOS, and Android.

[Buy from Moneydance](#)

Kosmowski said he is constantly keeping track of his father's finances. "We spend a lot of time with compliance," he said. "Dad's a veteran. He served in Vietnam, and the VA requires a detailed breakdown of how the funds are spent."

Kosmowski said he not only needs to keep track of his father's food, housing, medications, and legal fees, but he needs to keep them separate from his own family's finances.

[Moneydance](#) is one of the tools (in addition to [QuickBooks](#)) that he uses to keep track of his father's bills and supplies and to separate them from his own family and business finances. This personal-finance software can create and track multiple budgets, as well as bills, expenses, and investments. Designed to work on almost every desktop and mobile platform, Moneydance can also create summaries, graphs, and reports, and it can send reminders about single and recurring transactions.

This article was edited by Jon Chase and Claire Perlman. Illustrations by George Wylesol for NYT Wirecutter.