Smartwatches

A smartwatch is a watch that thinks a little. It tells the time, and it also shows your messages, lets you answer calls from your wrist, tracks your steps and sleep in the background, and — the feature many people buy it for — can call for help if it senses a hard fall and you do not answer.

The four names to know

There are four main choices — and the golden rule is: start with the phone you already own. The watch has to match the phone.

Apple Watch — iPhone only: Fall detection is built into every model from Series 4 onward, and it turns on by itself for anyone 55 or older once your age is in your Health profile. It only works with an iPhone — it will not pair with a Samsung or any Android phone.

Samsung Galaxy Watch — Android only: It does not work with iPhones at all. Unlike the Apple Watch, fall detection is not on by default — turn it on in the Galaxy Wearable app under Watch settings → Safety and emergency → Hard fall detection, and add at least one emergency contact.

Google Pixel Watch — Android only: Includes fall detection and car-crash detection. It needs an Android phone and a Google account, set up through the Pixel Watch app — it will not pair with an iPhone.

Fitbit by Google — works with both: It is the simplest choice: a slim band that counts steps, checks heart rate, and tracks sleep, with a battery that lasts about a week instead of a day. Fitbit devices work with both iPhones and Android phones. Setup needs two things on your phone: the Fitbit app and a Google account to sign in with — the old Fitbit-only accounts are retired, so a Google account is now required.

What matters most for seniors

Fall detection. Apple Watch, Galaxy Watch, and Pixel Watch all have it — just remember the Samsung one must be switched on by hand. Set up your emergency contacts when you first set up the watch.

What matters less

And one honest note: a watch's fall detection calls emergency services, but it is not a staffed medical-monitoring service — if your doctor says you need one of those, keep it.

When to call Sean instead

- Choosing between models before you buy — bring your phone and Sean will match the right watch to it.
- Setting up fall detection and emergency contacts the right way.
- The watch will not pair, will not charge, or keeps asking for things you do not understand.