

Choosing a tablet for an ageing parent

Who this is for: adult children buying for a parent

Reading time: about 5 minutes

In one line: the choice of tablet matters far less than the three decisions everyone skips.

We are vendor-neutral, we sell nothing, and we have set up tablets of every brand in homes across Sydney. So when we say the brand decision is the least important one you will make, that is experience talking, not a sales pitch. Families agonise over iPad versus Samsung versus something cheaper, then sleepwalk through the decisions that actually determine whether the thing gets used or ends up in a drawer.

Here is the whole process, in the order that matters.

Decision one: what is it actually for?

Not "what can it do". What will *this person* do with it? For most older Australians the honest answer is short: video calls with family, photos, messages, maybe news, a game, or the radio. That is a wonderful list. It is also a list any tablet made in the last five years handles easily, which is why the spec sheet does not matter.

Ask your parent what they want it for. Ask in a way that allows "nothing, please stop buying me things" as an answer, because a tablet nobody asked for starts its life ten points behind. If the want is real, even if it is just "I'd like to see the grandkids' faces", you have a foundation.

Decision two: who else is in the ecosystem?

This is the closest thing to a brand rule we will give you. **Match the family.** If the children and grandchildren are iPhone people, an iPad means FaceTime works with everyone instantly, and the family can help with questions because the buttons are where they expect. If the family is Android, a Samsung or similar keeps the same advantage.

The best tablet is the one that matches the people who will be on the other end of the video calls and the other end of the support questions. Going against the family ecosystem to save a hundred dollars usually costs more than that in confusion within the first month.

A few practical notes that do matter, whatever the brand:

- **Bigger is better.** Larger screens mean larger text and larger buttons. Small tablets are for travellers, not for ageing eyes.
- **Storage barely matters** for the use list above. Do not pay for it.
- **Buy current, not clearance.** A tablet from a dusty corner of the catalogue may stop receiving updates years sooner. Updates are security, and security matters more for your parent than for anyone.
- **A good case and a stand.** A tablet that can be propped up turns video calls from an arm workout into a cup of tea.

Decision three: who does the setup, and how?

Here is the step almost everyone skips, and it is the one that decides everything. A tablet handed over in its box, factory-fresh, is not a gift. It is homework.

Proper setup for an older person means:

- **An account of their own**, with the password written down somewhere agreed and safe. Not your account, and not a password that lives only in your head, or theirs.
- **Subtraction.** Remove or hide every app that is not on the list from decision one. A home screen with five large icons is not a dumbed-down tablet. It is a fitted one.
- **Text and display sized for their eyes**, accessibility features turned on where they help, and the volume connected to their hearing, including hearing aids if worn.
- **The most important thing made one tap.** If video calls are the point, the grandkids should be one large photo-button away. Every additional tap is a place the call goes to die.
- **Written notes.** Large print, plain language, step by step, kept next to the tablet. A recipe card, not a manual.

Then, and this is the part that makes it stick, **someone patient teaches, more than once.** The person does it themselves, slowly, with their own hands, several times. A demonstration is not training. If nobody in the family has the patience or the proximity for this, that is not a failing, it is a staffing problem, and it is exactly what services like ours exist for.

Decision four: who answers the phone in week six?

Something will eventually go wrong. An update will move a button, a password will expire, the wifi will hiccup. Decide now, out loud, who handles that, and make sure your parent knows the question is welcome. The drawer claims most of its victims in the gap between "something stopped working" and "I didn't want to bother anyone".

If the answer is a family member, lovely. If the family member is time-poor, lives interstate, or tends to do it *for* them at speed rather than *with* them at their pace, consider booking periodic support visits the way you would book a gardener. It is not extravagant. It is what keeps the gift alive.

The short version

Ask what it is for. Match the family ecosystem. Buy big, current, and cased. Then spend your real energy on the part nobody markets: fitted setup, written notes, patient training, and a named person for week six. Do those, and the brand on the back of the tablet will be the least interesting thing about it.

Gray Matter Solutions does the setup, training, notes, and week-six question-answering, in the home, at the person's pace. We sell no hardware and take no commissions, so our advice has no thumb on the scale.

Buying soon and want a second opinion first? The 15-minute call is free. Email phil@graymatter.team or visit graymatter.team.

Gray Matter Solutions Pty Ltd, ABN 24 678 904 231. In-home technology support across Sydney's Northern Beaches, North Shore, and Inner West.

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