



## Medical Alert Systems - Better Safe Than Sorry

**by Barbara Alpern**

As we continue to move through the various stages of our lives, our physical status and often, our living situations, continue to change. One out of three Americans 65 or older fall each year. Many have medical conditions that could result in an emergency and either live alone or have a spouse who is unable to assist them.

It is important at this point in our lives to evaluate our physical and living situations, and insure that we have a reliable means of getting help whenever and wherever we need it.

While everyone with a telephone has access to 911, we may not be able to get to the phone when we need it. Traditional medical alert systems include a base console that enables two-way communication within a certain range. It plugs into an electrical outlet and telephone line, along with a pendant containing a button you can push to signal an emergency. Newer devices are now available that include GPS that tracks you outside your home, fall detection technology, and even fire and carbon monoxide detection.

### Tips for Selecting a Medical Alert System

- Center should be located in the US, operate 24/7, and staff should be 911 or Emergency Medical Dispatcher certified. Response time should be 30 seconds or less.
- Call Center should be able to notify multiple parties in case of emergency (e.g., 911 and an emergency contact or friend).
- Support staff should be available 24/7 to provide medical and insurance information they've
  - Collected from you to the medical staff treating you.
- Home devices should have sufficient range to reach anywhere in your home, or at least the
  - Places where your risk is highest (e.g., the bathroom), and should have a backup battery with at least a 32 hour life in case of a power outage.
- If you do not have a landline, make sure that a cellular option is available.
- Buttons should be waterproof, and have options to wear as neck pendant, bracelet, or belt clip.



- Fall technology should be available (the button senses a fall and sends an alert even if you don't).
- Find out how, and how often, they test the system.
- If you're on the go a lot and have a tendency to fall or have a serious medical condition, consider a mobile device with GPS.
- If you have trouble getting to the phone fast enough to answer it, some devices allow you to answer your phone by pressing the button.
- Some companies check in with you regularly (e.g., weekly, or even daily), or offer reminder calls to take medication or perform certain tasks.
- Be sure to review contract terms - there should be no shipping fees, long-term contracts, activation or cancellation fees, or equipment charges.

**For additional information, visit:**

[http://www.aarp.org/health/doctors-hospitals/info-11-2010/medical\\_alert\\_systems.html](http://www.aarp.org/health/doctors-hospitals/info-11-2010/medical_alert_systems.html)

**OR**

<http://www.consumerreports.org/cro/2014/06/what-to-look-for-in-a-medical-alert-system/index.htm>.