

How to Choose an Emergency Alert System

More than 33 percent of accidents and falls involving people over age 65 occur at home, according to the CDC. Caregivers' worries never end, particularly when elderly loved ones want to remain living in their own homes – which most seniors would prefer to do for as long as possible. But what if they fall or have a heart attack, stroke or any medical emergency? What if they are home alone? What if they can't get to a telephone to dial for help?

There are many devices available that will instantly summon help in the event of an emergency. Sometimes called Personal Emergency Response System, Medical Alert, or Medical Emergency Response Systems, all systems work in essentially the same way: When emergency help (medical, fire, or police) is needed, the senior presses the transmitter's button. The elderly person wears the transmitter around his neck, on his wrist, belt buckle or wheelchair. In case of emergency, the senior calls for help by simply pressing the alert button, without needing to reach the telephone.

Emergency Response Systems have three components: a small radio transmitter (a help button carried or worn by the user); a console, or base station, connected to the user's telephone; and an emergency response center that monitors calls. The console automatically dials the Central Monitoring Station. Most systems can dial out even if the phone is in use or off the hook. (This is called "seizing the line.")

In addition to dialing the emergency response center, once notified the operator will also contact family, friends and neighbors. With so many systems on the market, what should a caregiver look for when purchasing?

To help you shop for an emergency response system, consider the following suggestions, which were published in a *Good Housekeeping* magazine in an article titled "Home Alone" (Nov 2005).

Price – Medical alert companies charge a monthly fee for monitoring services. Compare pricing, features and servicing of each system. Also, ask if the price will increase. Some companies raise the monitoring fee every year.

Hidden Costs – There should be no up-front costs. Seniors should not have to pay for the transmitter or monitoring console. The systems should be included as part of the monthly fee.

Contracts – Don't sign a long-term contract. Caregivers and their aging parents should be able to cancel at any time. Read the agreement carefully before signing.

Experience – How long has the company been in business?

Portability – Can the system be used when the elder is away from home – i.e., is it portable? Some companies offer a small base unit that is the size of an answering machine.

Ease of Use – Try out the system and make sure it is easy to use. Is the emergency button large and easy for the senior to see and press? Are there any complicated instructions, buttons on the console or other features that might be troublesome for the elder to operate?

Here are more things to look for when buying an emergency response system:

Waterproof - Make sure the emergency button can be worn in the bath or shower.

Trained Operators – Find out what kind of training the monitoring center staff receives. It's all about the service. In the case of an emergency when every second counts, you will want qualified care specialists to assist you and your parent.

Hours – Make sure the monitoring center is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, for both emergency monitoring and customer service. What happens if you are having difficulty using the system? Or perhaps you have questions about your service? Make sure to ask if the medical alert company has a 24/7-customer support line available in addition to monitoring service.

Testing – Your emergency response company should test the system on a regular basis to make sure it is functioning properly. Ask what procedures the center uses to test systems in your home.

Repairs – Make sure your system includes repair and replacement service. Obtaining the right medical alert system is crucial for your security and peace of mind.

Use these tips to help you make the right decision when choosing the best medical alert provider for you and your loved ones.

Source: AgingCare.com