

# Personal Emergency Response Systems



**I have a lot of health problems, and I live alone. I'm worried about a health emergency when no one is around. Would a personal emergency response system be useful?**

Personal Emergency Response Systems (PERS), also known as Medical Emergency Response Systems, let you call for help in an emergency by pushing a button. A PERS has three components: a small radio transmitter, a console connected to your telephone, and an emergency response center that monitors calls.

Transmitters are light-weight, battery-powered devices. You can wear one around your neck, on a wrist band, on a belt, or in your pocket. When you need help, you press the transmitter's help button, which sends a signal to the console. The console automatically dials one or more emergency telephone numbers. Most PERS are programmed to telephone an emergency response center. The center will try to find out the nature of your emergency. They also may review your medical history and check who should be notified.

You can purchase, rent, or lease a PERS. Keep in mind that Medicare, Medicaid, and most insurance companies typically don't pay for the equipment, and the few that pay require a doctor's recommendation. Some hospitals and social service agencies may

subsidize the device for low-income users. If you buy a PERS, expect to pay an installation fee and a monthly monitoring charge. Rentals are available through national manufacturers, local distributors, hospitals, and social service agencies, and fees often include the monitoring service. Read the contract carefully before you sign, and make note of extra charges, like cancellation fees. For more on how to shop for a PERS, visit the FTC website.

Your local Area Agency on Aging may be able to tell you what systems are available in your area. See if friends, neighbors, or relatives have recommendations. When you have a list of agencies you're considering, check with your local consumer protection agency, state Attorney General, and Better Business Bureau to see if any complaints have been filed against them. Questions you can ask a PERS company include:

- Is the monitoring center open 24/7? What kind of training do staff receive?
- What's the average response time, and who gets alerted?
- Will I be able to use the same system with other response centers if I move? What if I move to another city or state?
- What's your repair policy? What happens if I need a replacement?
- What are the initial costs? What costs are ongoing? What kind of services and features will I get?

Your options when it comes to PERS may depend on where you live. Try looking up your local Area Agency on Aging at [eldercare.gov](http://eldercare.gov), and ask them about your options.

## Who Cares About Personal Emergency Response Systems?

FTC

[ftc.gov/health](http://ftc.gov/health)

1-877-382-4357

(TTY: 1-866-653-4261)

Your Area Agency  
on Aging

[www.eldercare.gov](http://www.eldercare.gov)

1-800-677-1116

(TRS: 1-800-677-1116)

Checking Out a PERS Company

Better Business Bureau

[bbb.org](http://bbb.org)

Your state Attorney General

[naag.org](http://naag.org)

Your local consumer protection agency

[consumeraction.gov/](http://consumeraction.gov/)

[state.shtml](http://state.shtml)