

Personal Emergency Response Systems (PERS)

What Is a Medical Alert System?

These devices, also known as a personal emergency response system (PERS), include a small mobile device that enables you to connect to medical help quickly in a health emergency.

Mobile medical alert systems typically include:

- **A compact wearable help button.** Choose a pendant, bracelet or smartwatch that features an emergency button and a speaker for quick connection to a trained operator.
- **24/7 monitoring.** With the push of a button, the user can connect to a trained operator who can dispatch emergency services and/or alert family members or caregivers.
- **GPS location tracking.** Many medical alert devices have built-in GPS technology, allowing emergency responders or loved ones to locate the user in an emergency. GPS tracking is especially helpful for those with cognitive impairments or those prone to wandering.

The Different Types of Medical Alert Systems

In-Home Medical Alert Systems

In-home medical alert systems typically feature two components:

- A stationary base device that contains a speaker and microphone that connects the user to the company's call center. These devices use either a landline or cellular connection.
- A wearable element, such as a pendant or bracelet, with a button the user can press to activate the base device in the event of an emergency. Note that the button's range of use, meaning the maximum distance it can be from the base device to still activate a call when pressed, varies significantly from product to product.

Mobile Medical Alert Systems

Mobile medical alert systems are usually all-in-one devices that use cellular service and GPS technology to help the user connect with the call center both inside and outside the home. Typically, the more compact the device or the more features it offers, the shorter its battery life, making frequent charging important.

Additional Features

Automatic Fall Detection

Automatic fall detection is typically available for an additional monthly fee. This feature automatically notifies the call center when your wearable device senses—using technology like accelerometers and processors—that you had a fall and don't move for a period of time after the fall. It's designed to help in the event of a serious fall that renders the user unconscious, unable to press their help button manually or unable to communicate verbally with call monitoring center staff.

Wall Buttons

Many medical alert systems allow you to purchase additional wall buttons for the higher-risk areas of your home, such as the bathroom, kitchen and stairwells. Wall buttons are useful for people who forget to wear or dislike wearing their devices.

Lockboxes

Consider adding a lockbox to your device purchase. It's intended to hold an extra key for emergency responders so they don't have to break down a locked door to assist in an emergency. The location and access of your lockbox is often noted in your profile with the medical alert system, so the call center staff can share those details with emergency responders.

Water-Resistant Wearables

Water-resistant models are helpful if you want to be able to keep the wearable component of your medical alert system on your person or nearby while bathing or showering.

Medication Reminders

Some medical alert systems offer scheduled medication reminders.

Where to Purchase a Medical Alert System

Most medical alert systems can be purchased directly from manufacturers via their websites. You can also call their customer service lines to speak with company representatives directly and place your order over the phone. If you prefer shopping in person, retailers like Walmart and Best Buy sell medical alert systems, as well as pharmacies like CVS and Walgreens.

How Do I Pay for my Medical Alert System?

If cost is a concern, some Medicaid (MassHealth in MA) plans may pay for a medical alert system, but will likely require prior authorization. Ask your medical provider to assist. Some elder service agencies may also be able to help. To find your local elder service agency, in MA call MassOptions at 800-243-4636. In other states call the National Eldercare Locator at 800-677-1116.

Companies

There are many companies that offer these services, here are some you might consider (in alphabetical order):

- **Lifeline**, lifeline.com, 800-323-3479
- **Medical Alert**, medicalalert.com, 800-773-5948
- **Medical Guardian**, medicalguardian.com, 800-668-9200

This information is largely adapted from: forbes.com/health/l/best-medical-alert-systems

These listings are provided as a convenience for our patients and their families. This list is not comprehensive; there are other options. **Mass General Hospital (MGH) does not endorse any non-Mass General affiliated programs or services.**