

Independent Living Assistance

Personal alarms



Personal alarm systems allow the user to contact someone in an emergency.

Most of the systems are activated by a transmitter pendant that is worn by the user. A button is pressed, which sends an alert to a monitoring station (Monitored) or sends alerts to a pre-organised list of contacts (Non-monitored). Recent technology has allowed for some pendants to also include falls detection and GPS positioning. These systems operate via the mobile phone network.

The following are some of the differences and key features to look for when considering which personal alarm system is best for you.

Pacemaker

If you have a pacemaker, it is advised to discuss alarm options with the supplier, doctor and heart specialist prior to purchase, to ensure the device does not interfere with your pacemaker.

A home unit system

Typically includes a base unit and a pendant to trigger the response. When the pendant is pressed a signal is sent to the base unit to either alert a monitoring station or a pre-arranged list of contacts.

These systems no longer use a landline or NBN but operate via the mobile phone network.

The base unit requires mains power to operate and most have a built-in battery backup that allows the system to function even in the event of a power cuts

A mobile system

Operates without a base unit.

This system operates via the mobile phone network with a sim card directly inserted into the pendant or watch. As above, this allows the mobile system to alert the monitoring station or the pre-arranged list of contacts. Responders to the alert can communicate to the user through

the device through a built-in microphone and speaker.

Monitored system

Dials a monitoring station that is staffed 24 hours a day. The operator is then able to talk to the wearer and respond by either contacting emergency services or a pre-organised list of contacts if required. There are additional ongoing costs involved with monitored systems that provide this service.

Non-monitored system

Operates by dialling a pre-organised list of contacts, which can include emergency services (000). If the call from the system is not answered by the first pre-organised number, then the second pre-organised number is dialled. The system continues to call the pre-organised numbers until the call is answered.

Pendant or watch (transmitter)

The pendant or watch needs to be within reach at all times.

The pendant or watch is activated by pressing a button for a set period of time, usually 2–5 seconds. To help avoid accidental activation, some pendants or watches require two buttons to be pressed, and some also have a cancel button. Some systems allow multiple pendants to be linked to the receiver unit, which allows more than one person in the house to be monitored.

For home unit systems, the range in which the pendant will operate varies from system to system and depends on the environment in which it is used. Generally, the operating range is reduced when solid obstacles such as walls, sheds and fences are between the pendant transmitter and the receiver. This is important to consider if the user spends a lot of time outdoors. In the case of a large property, a special signal booster may be required to ensure adequate cover.

Additional features and accessories

The different systems available on the market may have various additional features and accessories that can be added to the basic call system, including:

Fall detection

Some pendants have built-in motion detection technology that detects movement patterns, speeds and sudden stops. When a fall is detected the system will be triggered

GPS positioning

Pre-organised contacts can log into a phone app or online system to check where the receiver pendant is.

Geofencing

This function allows users to set a GPS radius. If the pendant or watch exits the GPS radius, an alert will be sent to the pre-organised contact list associated with their system.

Watch alarm

Some personal alarms come in the form of watches that contain the features of most smart watches while providing the security and safety of a personal alarm system.

Low battery alerts

This alerts the listed pre-organised contacts that the transmitter is running low on battery. Some devices can alert the user with a verbal prompt.

Fall mat detection

Depending on the device and the provider, it can be linked to a falls mat that is triggered when the falls mat detects a fall.

Smoke detection and inactivity monitors

Depending on the device and the provider, it can be linked to a smoke detector and / or inactivity monitor.

Switch activation

Some devices can be triggered using switches i.e. a jelly switch. This is helpful when someone

who has restricted movement needs to use the alarm system.

Key safe

A key safe is recommended in conjunction with a personal alarm to allow easy access to your home by the responders (ambulance / friends / family / neighbours) to your alarm. The code and location of the key safe must be given to all responders (alarm monitoring company, family, friends and neighbours) whom you have nominated to assist you.

Questions to ask when selecting a system

- What are the establishment costs?
- What are the weekly/monthly monitoring fees?
- What are the SIM card charges?
- Would rental or purchase be the best option?
- If you have a pacemaker – Is the system compatible?
- Which is the most suitable pendant or watch, considering the weight, style, method of activation with one or two buttons, and water-resistance if required?
- Will the pendant or watch's operation cover the distance needed in the chosen environment (e.g. in garden areas)?
- Can you test the system before purchase?
- Is a two-way talk back facility offered that allows the monitoring base staff to speak with the user and, will it work throughout the house where required?
- Does it have a cancel facility if the system is accidentally activated?
- Is a reputable monitoring company operating the base station, with 24-hour staffing and appropriate security measures in place to ensure confidentiality?

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- What maintenance service is offered for testing procedures and backup in case of power failure?
- Are features able to be customised to meet individual needs?
- Will the pre-organised contact people be available in the event of an emergency and can they access the home if required?
- Do I need a key safe?
- Do I need to wear it all the time, even in the shower?

Catalyst Foundation (including Seniors Information Service) can help with sourcing useful information resources and with locating equipment suppliers. Tel. (08) 8168 8776, email information@catalystfoundation.com.au, website <https://catalystfoundation.com.au>.

The information contained here is general in nature and is not intended as health advice.

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Subsidies available and further information

Eligible older people and people with a disability may be able to access subsidies personal alarm.

Personal AlertSA (PASA)

This South Australia Government subsidy scheme is available to eligible people aged 75 years and over, for selected models of personal alarms. Additional eligibility criteria applies.

Contact: 1300 700 169

Email: pasa@sa.gov.au

www.sa.gov.au/topics/care-and-support/concessions/health-concessions/personal-alert-systems

My Aged Care

People who are receiving or are eligible for Australian Government aged care services may be able to obtain subsidised personal alarms, under the Commonwealth Home Support program (CHSP) or Home Care Package.

An assessment is required to access aged care services including equipment such as personal alarms.

Contact My Aged Care on:

1800 200 422.

www.myagedcare.gov.au

National Disability Insurance Scheme

NDIS participants who have Assistive Technology or Consumables funding approval may be eligible for a free personal alarm.