Common Questions About Medical Alarms in New Zealand

What Do People Want to Know About Medical Alarms?

Medical alarms have become a practical tool for many New Zealanders who want to stay independent while keeping a safety net. If you are considering one for yourself or a family member, you probably have a few questions. This article answers the most common ones, starting with the basics and then going into the details that matter most.

The direct answer is: a medical alarm is a device that lets you call for help at the push of a button. When you press it, a signal goes to a monitoring service or directly to family members, who can then respond. The key is knowing what each type offers and how it fits your daily life.



How Does a Medical Alarm Actually Work?

Most personal medical alarms are worn as a pendant or on a wristband. Inside is a small transmitter. When you press the button, the device sends a signal to a base unit that is plugged

into your home phone line or uses a cellular connection. The base unit then contacts a monitoring center or, in some cases, directly alerts your chosen family members. The alarm can also include features like GPS location sharing, so help can find you even if you cannot speak.

Many modern alarms also have fall detection. This means if you fall and cannot press the button, the device can sense the impact and send an alert automatically. Two-way calling is another common feature that lets the monitoring service or your family talk to you through the alarm's speaker to find out what is happening. Some providers, like the one behind familyr.co.nz, offer family monitoring instead of a call center, which means your loved ones get the alert and can check in on you directly.



Who Needs a Medical Alarm?

Anyone who lives alone, has a medical condition that could cause a sudden fall or seizure, or simply wants peace of mind can benefit. They are popular among older adults who want to age in place safely. But they are also used by younger people with conditions like epilepsy, diabetes, or mobility issues. Even someone recovering from surgery might use one temporarily.

It is not just about age. It is about the risk of being unable to call for help after an incident. If you spend time alone at home or in the garden, a medical alarm can be a simple backup that makes a big difference.

What Features Should I Look For?

The features you need depend on your lifestyle and health. Here are the main ones to consider:

- **SOS alerts**: The basic function. A button that sends an emergency signal. Make sure it is easy to press, even if your hands are weak or unsteady.
- **GPS location sharing**: If you go out walking, gardening, or driving, a device with GPS lets help find you wherever you are. This is especially useful for people with dementia who might wander.
- **Fall detection**: An automatic sensor that sends an alert if you fall. This is a major safety feature because a fall can leave you unconscious or unable to reach the button.
- **Two-way calling**: A speaker and microphone built into the device so the responder can talk to you and assess the situation before sending help.
- **Lifetime support and no monthly fees**: Some providers offer a one-off purchase with no ongoing monitoring charges. This can be a big advantage if you want predictable costs.

Think about whether you want the alarm to contact a professional call center or your own family. Family monitoring, as offered by familyr.co.nz, means your children or a trusted friend receive the alert and can respond directly. This can feel more personal and reassuring.

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Is a Medical Alarm the Same as a Personal Emergency Response System (PERS)?

Yes, essentially. A medical alarm is often called a personal emergency response system. Both terms refer to a device that lets you call for help. The difference is mainly in the features. A basic PERS might only have a button and a base unit. A modern medical alarm often includes

GPS, fall detection, and two-way calling. When looking at options, check what is included in the system, not just the name.

Can I Use It Outside My Home?

It depends on the device. Some alarms work only within a certain range of the base unit, usually inside the house and maybe the garden. Others, especially those with a cellular or GPS connection, work anywhere there is mobile network coverage. If you are active and go out frequently, look for a device that has location tracking and a waterproof rating so you can wear it in the shower or while gardening.

Water resistance is important because many falls happen in the bathroom. A medical alarm that can get wet without breaking is a practical feature to prioritise.



How Do I Choose Between a Landline and Cellular Alarm?

Landline alarms plug into a home phone socket and use the wired phone line to send the signal. They are reliable as long as the phone line works. Cellular alarms use a mobile network, which means they can work even if your landline is cut or during a power outage, as long as the backup battery works. Cellular models also make it easier to take the alarm with you when you travel.

If you have a reliable landline and do not go far from home, a landline model may be sufficient. If you want more flexibility or live in an area with frequent power cuts, a cellular or GPS model is a better choice.

What About Cost and Contracts?

Costs vary widely. Some systems require a monthly monitoring fee, while others offer a one-off payment for the device with no ongoing charges. The latter can save money over time if you plan to use the alarm for years. Some providers include lifetime support and battery replacements in the purchase price. It is worth comparing the total cost over a few years, not just the initial price.

Contracts can lock you in for 12 or 24 months. If you prefer flexibility, look for a provider that offers month-to-month service or a pay-once model. Always read the fine print about cancellation fees and what happens if you move.

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How Do I Set It Up and Test It?

Setup is usually straightforward. You plug the base unit into a phone socket and power outlet, then pair the pendant or wristband. The instructions will tell you to press the button and wait for a confirmation call or message. Testing weekly is a good habit. Press the test button or follow the provider's instructions to make sure the system is working. If you have a family monitoring service, alert your family that you are testing so they do not worry.

Batteries in the pendant last months or years, depending on use. When the battery is low, the device will usually beep or flash. Keep a spare battery or know how to recharge if the device uses a rechargeable battery.

What If I Press the Button by Accident?

Accidental presses happen. Most systems have a short delay or require you to press and hold the button for a couple of seconds before an alert is sent. If you do trigger an alert by mistake, you can usually cancel it by pressing the button again or speaking to the responder when they call. There is no penalty for false alarms, but it helps to let your family or the monitoring service know it was a mistake so they do not worry.



Can I Change the Monitoring Arrangement Later?

Some systems let you switch between professional monitoring and family monitoring, or change the list of family members who receive alerts. Others are locked into one type. If you think your needs might change, ask about flexibility before you buy. For example, you might start with family monitoring and later want a professional call center if your family becomes less available. Knowing you can adapt the system is reassuring.

What Makes a Medical Alarm Reliable?

Reliability comes from a few factors. The device should have a long battery life and a backup power source for the base unit in case of a power cut. The cellular network it uses should have good coverage where you live. The monitoring service, whether a call center or your family, should have a clear process for handling alerts. Some providers include lifetime support, which means you can call them for help with setup or troubleshooting without extra charges.

Reading reviews and asking your local community can give you a sense of which systems are trusted. But remember that even the best device is only as good as the person or service responding to the alert. Make sure your family knows how to respond and has your spare keys or access codes if needed.

Is a Medical Alarm Worth It?

For most people, a medical alarm offers peace of mind that is hard to put a price on. It means you can live independently knowing help is a button press away. It also reduces worry for family members who cannot be with you all the time. If you have a health condition that increases your risk of falling or needing urgent help, a medical alarm is a practical investment in your safety and confidence.

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It is not a replacement for a good support network or regular check-ins from family. But it is a reliable backup that works when you need it most.