What Happens When Someone Falls and Can't Reach a Phone?

The Risk of Falling Without Help

Falls are one of the most common hazards for older adults and people with limited mobility. When someone falls and cannot reach a phone, the situation can become serious quickly. The direct answer is that without a way to call for help, a person may lie on the floor for hours, sometimes overnight, waiting for someone to notice they are missing. This delay can turn a manageable injury into a medical emergency. The consequences range from dehydration and hypothermia to pressure sores, muscle breakdown, and a longer recovery from the fall itself. The psychological impact is also significant: fear of falling again can lead to reduced activity, weaker muscles, and a greater risk of future falls.

This is where a medical alarm with fall detection becomes valuable. It is designed to sense when a fall has occurred and automatically send an alert, even if the person cannot press a button or speak. Understanding how these devices work, what features matter, and how they fit into daily life can help someone choose the right level of protection.

How a Fall Happens and Why It Matters

Falls often occur in familiar places: the bathroom, the bedroom, the garden. A trip over a rug, a slippery floor, or a moment of dizziness can cause a sudden loss of balance. Once on the ground, the person may be unable to get up. If they have no way to call for help, they are trapped. The risk increases at night, when family members are asleep or away. Even a short period of lying on a hard floor can cause pressure damage to skin and muscles. In colder weather, body temperature can drop dangerously.

A medical alarm with fall detection removes the need to reach a phone. The device is worn on the body and uses sensors to detect the impact and angle of a fall. When it detects a fall, it sends an emergency alert to a list of nominated contacts. The alert can include the person's location, so help knows exactly where to go. This is especially important if the person lives alone or is caring for themselves during the day.

View the location on Google Maps

Automatic Fall Detection: How It Works

Fall detection technology has improved in recent years. Most devices use a combination of an accelerometer and an impact sensor. The accelerometer measures sudden changes in speed and direction. When the device detects a rapid downward movement followed by a stop, it

registers a fall. The impact sensor measures the force of the landing. Together, these sensors can distinguish a fall from everyday actions like sitting down quickly, bending over, or dropping the device.

Some devices also use an angle sensor. If the person remains lying down for a set time, the device assumes help is needed and sends an alert. This helps prevent false alarms from a dropped device or a sudden movement that looks like a fall. The sensitivity can often be adjusted, so the wearer can choose a setting that matches their activity level. For someone who is active, a higher sensitivity may be needed to avoid false alarms. For someone who moves slowly, a lower sensitivity might work better.

What Happens When an Alert Is Sent

When the device detects a fall, it first tries to contact the wearer. A voice call or a tone asks if they are okay. If the person responds, the device cancels the alert. If there is no response, or if the person says they need help, the device sends an emergency alert. The alert goes to a list of nominated contacts: family members, friends, neighbours, or carers. The contacts receive an SMS or a phone call with a message that someone has fallen and needs help. The alert can include the GPS location of the device, so the contact knows exactly where to go.



Some devices can be programmed to call contacts in a set order until someone answers. If no one responds, the device can call emergency services directly. This layered approach means that even if the first contact is unavailable, the call for help will eventually reach someone who can act.

Two-Way Voice Calling and GPS Location

Two-way voice calling is a key feature of many medical alarms. When an alert is sent, the contact can speak to the person through the device. This allows the contact to assess the situation, reassure the person, and decide what to do. The voice call can also help the contact understand whether the person needs an ambulance or just help getting up. This reduces unnecessary emergency callouts and gives family members peace of mind.

GPS location sharing is another important feature. It allows the device to pinpoint the person's location, whether they are at home or out and about. This is especially useful for someone who enjoys walking, gardening, or visiting friends. If they fall in the garden or on a walk, the GPS location tells the contact exactly where to find them. Some devices also work with mobile networks, so the alarm functions wherever there is compatible coverage. This means the person can wear the device at home, in the car, or on a trip and still have protection.

Choosing the Right Device and Wearable Options

The way a medical alarm is worn matters for comfort and reliability. Most devices come with several attachment options: a lanyard around the neck, a wristband, a belt clip, an armband, or a keyring. The choice depends on the person's habits and physical needs. Someone who is active may prefer a wristband or armband that stays on during movement. Someone who is less mobile might find a lanyard easier to put on and take off. A keyring attachment can be useful for someone who keeps their keys with them at all times.

Battery life is another consideration. Many devices have rechargeable batteries that last a day or more. Some use replaceable batteries that last for months. It is important to charge the device regularly and to have a backup plan, such as a spare battery or a second device. The device should be tested periodically to make sure the fall detection and alert functions work correctly.

When a Fall Happens: Practical Steps

If someone falls and is wearing a medical alarm with fall detection, the device will automatically send an alert. The person should try to stay calm and wait for help. If they are able, they can press the SOS button on the device to manually trigger an alert. They should also

try to move to a comfortable position if possible, without straining themselves. Lying on a soft surface or using a cushion can reduce pressure on the body.

If the person does not have a device and cannot reach a phone, they should try to make noise: shout, bang on a wall or floor, or use a walking stick to knock on a door or window. If they have a mobility aid, they can try to use it to get to a phone or a door. But the safest approach is to have a device that works without needing the person to do anything.

False Alarms and How to Manage Them

False alarms are a common concern with fall detection devices. A sudden movement, dropping the device, or a vigorous activity like gardening can trigger an alert. Most devices have a delay or a cancellation feature: the wearer can press a button to stop the alert before it is sent. The sensitivity can also be adjusted to reduce false alarms. For someone who is very active, a device with a longer delay or a higher threshold may be better. For someone who is frail, a lower threshold may be appropriate.



It is a good idea to discuss with family members or carers what to do if a false alarm occurs. The contacts should know that they may receive an alert that is not an emergency, and they should be prepared to check in with the person. Some devices allow the wearer to send a test alert to contacts so everyone knows what to expect.

The Role of Medical Alarms in Independent Living

Medical alarms with fall detection are not just for emergencies. They allow people to live independently with less fear. Knowing that help is available at the press of a button, or automatically if a fall occurs, gives confidence to continue daily activities. This can include

walking the dog, cooking, gardening, or visiting friends. The device becomes a tool for maintaining independence, not a reminder of frailty.

It is important to choose a device that fits the person's lifestyle and comfort. Some people prefer a simple pendant, while others want a more discreet wristband. The device should be worn consistently, not just when going out. Many falls happen at home, and the device should be worn day and night, including during sleep. Some devices are waterproof and can be worn in the shower, where many falls occur.

Familyr is also on YouTube.

For family members, a medical alarm provides reassurance. They no longer have to worry about their loved one being stranded after a fall. They can go about their day knowing that if something happens, they will be notified quickly. The alerts can be sent to up to ten contacts, so the responsibility can be shared among family, friends, and neighbours.

What to Look For in a Medical Alarm

When choosing a medical alarm with fall detection, consider the following:

- Automatic fall detection: Does the device use impact and angle sensors to detect falls without needing a button press?
- Two-way voice calling: Can contacts speak to the person through the device after an alert?
- GPS location sharing: Does the device include GPS to help contacts find the person outdoors?
- Battery life and charging: How often does the device need to be charged, and is there a low-battery alert?
- Wearable options: Does the device come with multiple attachment styles to suit different preferences?

These features are common in modern medical alarms, but the exact specifications vary. It is wise to ask the provider about the device's range, network coverage, and how the alert system works. Some devices require a subscription or a monitoring service, while others work through family contacts only. Understanding the costs and the process before buying helps avoid surprises.

When Help Arrives

When a fall alert is sent, the contact should respond as quickly as possible. They should call the person through the device's two-way voice function to assess the situation. If the person is

injured or cannot get up, the contact should call emergency services. If the person is not injured and just needs help getting up, the contact can go to them directly. The device can also be used to guide the contact to the exact location using GPS.

After the fall, it is important to check for injuries and to help the person get up safely. If the person is in pain or cannot move, it is best to wait for paramedics. Moving an injured person can make the injury worse. The contact should also check the home for hazards that may have caused the fall, such as loose rugs, wet floors, or poor lighting, and take steps to reduce the risk of another fall.



Living with a Medical Alarm

Integrating a medical alarm into daily life takes some getting used to. The wearer should wear the device consistently and test it regularly. Family members should know how to respond to alerts and should update their contact information if it changes. It is also a good idea to review the device's settings periodically, especially if the person's health or activity level changes.

Medical alarms are not a replacement for other fall prevention measures, such as exercise, home modifications, and regular health check-ups. But they are a powerful tool for reducing the risk of a long lie after a fall. For someone who lives alone or spends time alone, a medical

alarm with fall detection can be the difference between a minor incident and a serious emergency.

If you are considering a medical alarm for yourself or a family member, take the time to understand the features and how they work. Ask about the device's fall detection accuracy, battery life, and the process for sending alerts. A good device should be easy to use, comfortable to wear, and reliable in an emergency. It should also fit the person's daily routine, so they will actually wear it.

Familyr provides family-monitored personal medical alarms in New Zealand with SOS alerts, GPS location sharing, fall detection and two-way calling. The business is based at 14 Grand View Road, Remuera, Auckland 1050, New Zealand, and can be contacted on +64 9 872 0345.