How to respond when your loved one's medical alarm goes off

A senior emergency alert from a wearable medical alarm can feel unsettling, especially when it comes through while you are at work, asleep, or on the other side of town. The natural first reaction is to call back immediately or race to the house. But a calm, prepared response will be more effective and less stressful for everyone involved. The key is having a simple checklist you can follow each time an alert arrives, so you know exactly what to do and in what order.

First: confirm the nature of the alert

Not every alert means a crisis. Sometimes a senior may press the button accidentally, or the fall detection sensor may trigger during a sudden movement like bending to pick something up. The first step is to find out what kind of alert was sent. Most modern medical alarm systems, including those offered by familyr.co.nz, send different signals for a fall, a manual SOS, or a low-battery warning. Check the notification on your phone or the monitoring portal to see which type it is. This will tell you how urgently you need to act. A fall alert with no movement afterwards demands immediate action, while a low-battery warning simply means you need to charge or replace the device soon.

Attempt two-way communication

If the system supports two-way calling, use it to speak directly with the person who triggered the alert. This feature lets you hear their voice and assess the situation without needing to be in the room. Ask simple questions like "Are you okay?" or "Can you tell me what happened?" Listen for clarity of speech, breathing, and any sounds of distress. If the senior sounds confused or breathless, or if they do not respond at all, escalate your response. Two-way communication is one of the most valuable tools in a caregiver plan because it gives you real-time information and can often resolve a false alarm in under a minute.



Contact the senior's immediate neighbours or nearby family

If you cannot reach the senior through two-way calling, or if the conversation leaves you concerned, your next step is to contact someone who can physically check on them. This might be a neighbour who has agreed to help, a family member who lives close by, or a friend who visits regularly. Keep a short list of emergency contacts for this exact purpose, stored in your phone or on a note near your computer. The contact sequence should prioritise the person who is most likely to be available and willing to respond quickly. Having a plan for who to call after you has saved many caregivers from feeling helpless while they wait for emergency services to arrive.

Use GPS location data to guide responders

If the alert includes GPS location information, share this with anyone who is going to check on the senior, or with emergency services if you decide to call them. The location can tell you whether the senior is at home, outside in the garden, or somewhere unexpected. For example, if the GPS shows they are at a neighbour's house, the situation may be less urgent than if they are in an unfamiliar location. Knowing exactly where they are allows responders to go straight to the right place, rather than searching a large property or multiple rooms. This is especially helpful if the senior has memory difficulties and may not be able to describe where they are.

Assess whether to call emergency services

Not every alert requires an ambulance. A minor slip without injury, or a false alarm caused by the device being knocked, can be handled by a family member or neighbour. However, you should call emergency services if the senior is unresponsive, bleeding, having trouble breathing, or if you suspect a broken bone or head injury. Trust your instincts here. It is better to call for help and have it turn out to be unnecessary than to delay and regret it. When you do call, give the operator the senior's address, the nature of the alert, and any medical conditions you know about. Stay on the line until they tell you to hang up.


SOS

Notify the rest of the family network

Once the immediate situation is under control, let other family members or caregivers know what happened. An urgent situation can be frightening for everyone who cares about the senior, and a quick update prevents multiple people from calling or showing up at the house. It also keeps the care team informed so they can adjust their schedule or prepare for any follow-up needs, such as a doctor's appointment or equipment repair. Many medical alarm systems allow you to send an SMS alert to a group of contacts automatically. If yours does, use it. Otherwise, send a quick text or make a short phone call to each person on your list.

Review and reset the alarm system

After the alert has been resolved, make sure the wearable device is back on the senior's wrist or around their neck, and that it is charged or has fresh batteries. Check that the base unit, if there is one, is plugged in and working. This step is easy to forget when you are relieved that everything turned out fine, but a device that is not ready for the next fall or emergency is no use at all. If the alert was a false alarm, consider whether the device's sensitivity settings need adjusting. Some systems allow you to lower the fall detection sensitivity if the senior is active and triggers it often, or increase it if they are frail and need a higher chance of detection.

Update your caregiver plan

Every emergency is a learning opportunity. After the dust settles, take a few minutes to think about what went well and what could have been smoother. Did you have the right emergency contacts handy? Did the two-way communication work as expected? Was the GPS location accurate? Make small changes to your response protocol based on what you learned. You might add a new contact, update a phone number, or decide to keep a spare charger in the car. Over time, these small updates make your plan more reliable and reduce your stress when the next alert comes.



Having a structured checklist for responding to a senior emergency alert turns a potentially panicked reaction into a calm, step-by-step process. It helps you think clearly, use the features of the alarm system effectively, and get the right help to the right place quickly. The peace of mind that comes from knowing exactly what to do is one of the greatest gifts a caregiver can give themselves and the person they care for. A service like familyr.co.nz can provide the technology, but your preparation and calm response make the real difference in an emergency.