

# Personal Emergency Response Systems

## What is a personal emergency response system?

A personal emergency response system (PERS) uses an electronic device that makes it easy to call for help in an emergency. A PERS can be very helpful and give some peace of mind if you are disabled or an older adult living alone. It is also called a medical emergency response system.

## How does a PERS work?

The device includes a transmitter that can send a radio signal to your phone and dial 1 or more preselected emergency numbers. It is light-weight and battery-powered and can be worn on your wrist or on a chain around your neck. It can also be carried on a belt or in a pocket. If you need emergency help (for example, emergency medical care, the fire department, or police), you press the transmitter's HELP button to send a signal to your phone. Most systems can dial out even if your phone is in use or off the hook. They are usually are programmed to identify you to the emergency response center. The center will try to determine the nature of the emergency and what kind of help you need.

## How can I get a PERS?

A PERS can be purchased, rented, or leased. In most states, neither Medicare nor Medicaid will pay for a PERS, nor will most insurance companies. The few insurance companies that do pay require a prescription from your healthcare provider. Purchase prices can range from \$200 to \$1,500. You will also have to pay an installation fee and monthly fees. Monthly monitoring may cost \$10 to \$50 a month.

To help you find a PERS that meets your needs:

- Check out several systems before making a decision.
- Ask about the price, features, and servicing of each system.
- Find out if you can use the system with other response centers. For example, can you use the same system if you move?
- Make sure the system is easy to use.
- Test the system to make sure it works from anywhere in and around your home. Make sure nothing interferes with transmissions.
- Review the warranty and service contract.
- Find out how to get a replacement or repair if the device is not working right.
- Read your purchase, rental, or lease agreement carefully before signing it.

Ask these questions about the response center:

- Is the monitoring center available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week?
- Are calls answered locally or in another state or country?
- What is the average response time?

- What kind of training does the center staff receive?
- How does the center test the system in your home? How often are tests conducted?

Before doing business with a company selling a PERS, contact your local consumer protection agency, state attorney general's office, and Better Business Bureau. Ask if any complaints have been filed against the companies you are considering. You may want to get recommendations from friends, neighbors, or relatives who use emergency response systems.

Choosing the best service and equipment for your particular situation can be difficult. However, if the right PERS is chosen, it can help you stay safe and independent as well as increase the peace of mind for your family and caregivers.

Developed by RelayHealth.

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