What to check when choosing a personal alarm for a senior relative

Choosing a personal alarm for a senior relative can feel like a big responsibility. You want something that will actually help in an emergency, not just sit in a drawer gathering dust. But with so many options on the market, it is easy to get overwhelmed by features, contracts and fine print. The best approach is to go in with a clear list of what matters most. Here are the key points to check before you buy.

How the alarm is activated

The whole point of a personal alarm is that the wearer can call for help when they need it. So the first thing to check is how easy it is to trigger. Most alarms use a button on the device itself, but the size, shape and force required vary a lot. For someone with arthritis or limited hand strength, a tiny button that needs a firm press may be useless in a crisis. Look for a large, clearly marked button that works even through clothing. Some models also support automatic activation through fall detection, which can be a lifesaver if the wearer is unconscious or cannot reach the button.

Fall detection that actually works

Falls are the most common reason seniors need help, and many alarms now include automatic fall detection. But not all fall detection is created equal. Some systems use a simple accelerometer that triggers on sudden movement, which can lead to false alarms from dropping the device or a sudden jolt. Others use more sophisticated algorithms that analyse the wearer's movement patterns and can distinguish a genuine fall from everyday activity. When you are looking at a personal alarm for seniors, ask how the fall detection works and whether it can be adjusted for the wearer's mobility level. A system that sends too many false alarms will quickly be ignored or turned off.



Range and connectivity

Personal alarms fall into two broad categories: those that work only at home and those that work anywhere. A home-based system uses a base station connected to your phone line or internet, and the wearable pendant only works within a certain range of that base. That range is usually around 30 to 50 metres indoors. For someone who never leaves the house alone, that may be enough. But if your relative enjoys gardening, walking the dog, or visiting the local shops, a system with GPS tracking and cellular connectivity gives much better peace of mind. The trade-off is that mobile alarms often need a data plan or subscription, so check whether there are ongoing costs.

Battery life and charging

An alarm that runs out of battery when it is needed is worse than no alarm at all. Check how long the battery lasts on a full charge and whether the device gives a clear low-battery warning. Some pendants use a rechargeable battery that needs to be docked every night, which can be a problem for someone who forgets or finds the dock fiddly. Others use a long-life battery that lasts a year or more and is replaced when it runs out. For a mobile alarm, also check whether the GPS and cellular functions drain the battery faster than the basic SOS button. If the device

needs frequent charging, make sure the charging process is simple enough for the wearer to manage on their own.

Two-way communication

An alarm that only sends a signal is limited. When the alert reaches the monitoring centre or a family member, they need to know what is happening. Two-way calling means the wearer can speak directly to a responder through the device itself, explaining whether they have fallen, feel unwell, or just need reassurance. This feature is especially valuable if the wearer lives alone and may not be able to open the door or reach a phone. Check whether the device has a built-in speaker and microphone that are clear enough for someone with hearing difficulties, and whether the call goes to a professional monitoring service or directly to a family member.

Monthly fees and contracts

The cost of a personal alarm does not end with the purchase price. Many systems charge a monthly monitoring fee that can add up to hundreds of dollars a year. Some also lock you into a long contract, making it hard to switch if the service is poor or the wearer no longer needs it. Before you buy, find out exactly what the monthly fee covers and whether there are any hidden costs for activation, cancellation, or replacement devices. Some providers, like those behind the FamilyR Medical Alarm GPS fall detection alarm, offer a service without monthly fees, which can make a big difference to a household budget. Always read the terms carefully so you know what you are signing up for.



Water resistance

An alarm that stops working when it gets wet is a problem, because accidents often happen in the bathroom or while washing up. Check the water resistance rating of the device. A rating of IP67 or IP68 means it can be submerged in water for a period of time without damage. That is important for someone who wears the alarm in the shower or while doing dishes. Some pendants are splash-proof but not submersible, so if the wearer drops it in the bath, it may stop working. For a personal alarm for seniors, water resistance is not a luxury feature; it is a basic safety requirement.

Ease of setup and daily use

A complicated alarm system that needs a smartphone app, WiFi passwords, and regular updates is not going to work for someone who is not tech-savvy. Look for a device that can be set up and used without a computer or phone. Ideally, it should come pre-configured so the wearer only needs to press the button to test it. If the system does require an app, make sure a family member can manage the settings remotely. The simpler the daily routine, the more likely the alarm will be worn and used.

Family notification features

Some alarms alert only a monitoring centre, while others also notify family members directly. If you live nearby and want to be the first responder, a system that sends an alert to your phone can be faster than waiting for a call from a remote centre. Check whether the alarm can send alerts to multiple people at once, and whether it gives you the ability to listen in or talk to the wearer through the device. This kind of family support can make everyone feel more connected and involved in the senior's safety.



Making the right choice means weighing these features against the actual needs and habits of the person who will wear the alarm. A device that works perfectly for one person may be frustrating or even unsafe for another. Take the time to think about where the wearer spends their day, how mobile they are, and who they want to call when something goes wrong. A good personal alarm for seniors is one that fits seamlessly into daily life and gives both the wearer and their family real peace of mind. Devices like the **FamilyR Medical Alarm GPS fall detection alarm** aim to provide that combination of reliability and simplicity, with features that support independent living without adding complexity or ongoing costs.