Building a reliable emergency contact list for older adults using a fall alert system

Why a contact list matters more than you think

A fall alert for elderly family members is only as useful as the people who receive it. The device can detect a fall and send a signal, but what happens next depends entirely on who is on the other end. A well-thought-out list of emergency contacts turns a technical alert into real help. Without one, a fall alert for elderly users risks becoming a notification that no one acts on in time.

Building that list takes more than jotting down a few phone numbers. It requires thinking about who can respond at different times of day, who lives nearby, and who has the skills and willingness to help. This practical checklist will guide you through the key points to consider when setting up emergency contacts for a wearable fall alert system. Many families choose a system like the one offered by familyr.co.nz precisely because it integrates with a personal response plan. The following steps will help you create a contact list that works in real situations.

Start with the person who lives closest

Distance matters in an emergency. A neighbour who is home during the day and can be at the door in two minutes is often more valuable than a relative who lives an hour away. When a fall happens, every minute counts. The first contact on your list should be someone who can physically reach the elderly person quickly. This might be a neighbour, a nearby friend, or a family member living in the same suburb. Make sure that person knows they are on the list and has agreed to respond. It is also worth checking whether they have a key or know how to get into the house if the door is locked.

Include a second responder for backup

What happens if the closest person is unreachable? They might be on holiday, asleep with the phone on silent, or simply not looking at their phone. A fall alert for elderly users needs a backup. The second contact should be another person who can reasonably get to the home within a short time. This could be another neighbour, a local family member, or a community volunteer. When you set up the list, test both numbers. Call them and confirm the person is still at that address and willing to help. People move, change numbers, or change their availability. Review this backup contact every few months.



Think about response capacity, not just proximity

Being close is not enough if the person cannot actually help. A neighbour who is elderly themselves, has mobility issues, or is caring for a young child might not be able to assist someone who has fallen. The same goes for someone who does not drive or who works from home and cannot leave their desk. When choosing emergency contacts, consider whether the person is physically able to lift or support someone, whether they have a car, and whether they can leave their own responsibilities. A fall alert for elderly wearers often includes two-way communication, so the contact person may need to speak calmly through the device to reassure the person who has fallen. Choose people who stay level-headed under pressure.

Add contacts who can coordinate from a distance

Not all emergencies require someone to rush to the house. Sometimes the fall is not serious, but the elderly person needs someone to call an ambulance or contact a family member. Your list should include at least one person who can manage logistics from afar. This might be a son or daughter who lives in another city but can make phone calls, check on the situation through location sharing features, and coordinate next steps. GPS location data from the fall alert system can help this person know exactly where the person is, even if they are not at home. This remote contact should have access to the elderly person's medical information, doctor's contact details, and any relevant care instructions.

Include someone who can respond during unusual hours

Falls do not happen between 9 am and 5 pm. They happen at night, early in the morning, on weekends, and on public holidays. Your emergency contact list must cover these times. The person who is available during a weekday morning might be completely unreachable at midnight. Consider adding a night owl or someone who works shifts and is awake during odd hours. If the elderly person lives alone, it is especially important to have a contact who can respond at 2 am. Some families use a rotating roster where different people take responsibility for different times of the week. Others rely on a single person who has agreed to be on call. Whatever the arrangement, make sure it is written down and everyone knows their role.

Use SMS alerts for multiple people at once

One of the most practical features of a modern fall alert for elderly users is the ability to send an SMS alert to multiple contacts simultaneously. This means you do not have to rely on one person seeing the alert. When you set up the system, add several phone numbers that will receive a text message the moment a fall is detected. The message should include the person's name, a note that a fall has been detected, and a link to their GPS location. This way, everyone on the list knows at the same time and can decide among themselves who is best placed to respond. It also reduces the chance that the alert is missed because someone was away from their phone.



Discuss the response plan in advance

A list of contacts is only the beginning. Each person on the list needs to know what to do when they get an alert. Do they call the elderly person first? Do they go straight to the house? Should they call an ambulance before they leave? Create a simple response plan that covers these steps and share it with everyone on the contact list. The plan can be as short as a few bullet points. The key is that everyone follows the same procedure. This avoids confusion and wasted time during an actual emergency. The familyr.co.nz system supports two-way voice communication, so the first responder can talk directly to the elderly person through the device and assess the situation before deciding what to do next. Make sure your contacts know how to use this feature.

Keep the list updated and visible

Emergency contacts change. People move, change phone numbers, or simply become less reliable over time. A fall alert for elderly users should have a contact list that is reviewed at least every three months. Set a reminder in your calendar to check each number, confirm availability, and update the list if needed. Also, keep a physical copy of the list somewhere visible in the elderly person's home, such as on the fridge or next to the phone. This helps if a visitor or carer needs to make a call on their behalf. The same list should be stored in the fall alert system's online portal or app so that it is accessible to anyone who needs it.

Consider adding whanau and carers

For many families in New Zealand, the concept of whanau (extended family) is central to caregiving. Aunts, uncles, cousins, and close family friends can all play a role in the emergency contact network. They may live further away, but they can still help by making phone calls, contacting other family members, or providing emotional support. Carers who visit regularly should also be on the list. They know the elderly person's routines, health conditions, and preferences. If a carer is on the list, they can respond quickly and with relevant knowledge. Just make sure the carer has agreed to be contacted and knows how the fall alert system works.

Test the system regularly

A list that has never been tested is a list that might fail. Once you have built your emergency contact list, run a test. Have someone press the fall alert button (or simulate a fall if the device allows testing). See how long it takes for the SMS alerts to arrive. Check whether each person receives the message and understands what to do. If there are problems, fix them. Testing also helps the elderly person feel more confident using the device. They will know that when they press the button, someone will actually come. Regular testing keeps the whole system in good working order and gives everyone peace of mind.



Final thoughts

Choosing emergency contacts for a fall alert for elderly family members is not a one-time task. It is an ongoing process that requires thought, communication, and periodic review. The right contacts can mean the difference between a short wait for help and a long, frightening ordeal. By following this checklist, you can build a network that is ready to respond when it matters most. Whether you use a simple pendant alarm or a more advanced system with GPS and two-way voice, the people behind the alert are what make it truly effective. Take the time to set it up properly now, and update it as circumstances change. That effort is one of the best ways to protect the safety and independence of an older loved one.