

# Choosing Between ADT Medical Alarms and Modern Personal Alert Systems

## Understanding the Shift in Senior Safety Technology

For years, the phrase "adt medical alarms" was synonymous with peace of mind for families worried about elderly relatives living alone. The big red button, the base unit plugged into a landline, the promise that help was just a press away. But the world of personal alarms has changed dramatically, especially here in New Zealand. The old systems still work, but newer options offer features that many families now consider essential. Understanding the differences can help you make a choice that truly fits your loved one's lifestyle.

I remember helping my own grandmother set up one of those early medical alert systems. It was a bulky pendant with a single button, connected to a base station that sat on her bedside table. It required a landline, and if she fell in the garden, the pendant would not reach the base unit. She wore it mostly indoors, and even then, she sometimes forgot to put it on after a shower. That experience taught me that the best alarm is the one a person actually wears and uses consistently. Modern systems have learned from those pain points, and the gap between what the old guard offers and what newer providers deliver is worth examining closely.



When people search for "[adt medical alarms](#)" today, they are often comparing that familiar brand with newer services that bundle GPS tracking, fall detection, and two-way calling into a single device. The market has shifted from a reactive model to a proactive one, where caregivers and family members can monitor safety in real time through mobile apps. This change is particularly important for seniors who still want to live independently but whose families worry about accidents at home or while they are out.

## **What ADT Medical Alarms Traditionally Offered**

ADT has been a household name in security for decades, and their medical alert systems carry that reputation for reliability. The classic setup involves a base station connected to a landline or cellular backup, with a waterproof pendant that the user presses to summon help. An operator answers, assesses the situation, and contacts emergency services or a designated caregiver. The simplicity of that process has helped many seniors feel safer in their own homes. The equipment is robust, the monitoring centres are staffed around the clock, and the brand trust is real.

However, the traditional ADT model has limitations that become more apparent as technology evolves. The pendant's range is often limited to the home, which means if your mum falls in the driveway or while gardening, the alarm may not trigger. There is no GPS tracking built into the basic pendant, so if she wanders due to Alzheimer's or gets lost on a walk, the system cannot pinpoint her location. The base unit requires power and a working phone line; if a storm knocks out both, the pendant becomes a piece of plastic. Battery backup exists in some models, but it is not always standard, and users must remember to test it regularly.



For many families, the biggest frustration is that the system only works when the user presses the button. If a fall leaves someone unconscious or unable to reach the pendant, the alarm does not go off. That is where newer systems with automatic fall detection have changed the

game. The old ADT approach is still a solid choice for someone who is mobile, cognitively sharp, and spends most of their time inside a small home. But for active seniors who go on nights out, visit friends, or enjoy a walk around the block, the limitations become real.

## **How Modern Personal Alarms Fill the Gaps**

New Zealand-based providers like Familyr have stepped in to offer a different kind of medical alert system. These devices are built around a waterproof pendant that includes a speaker and microphone for two-way calling, plus built-in GPS tracking and fall detection. The pendant itself connects to a cellular network (often using Vodafone or Spark infrastructure), so it works anywhere there is mobile coverage. That means your dad can wear it while mowing the lawn, going to the supermarket, or even on a trip to visit family in another city. The base station is optional; the pendant is the main device.

The two-way calling feature is particularly useful. If the pendant detects a fall or if the user presses the button, a trained operator speaks directly through the pendant to assess the situation. They can hear whether the person is coherent, ask if they need an ambulance, or call a family member. This reduces false alarms and ensures that emergency services are only dispatched when truly needed. For families who live far away, the ability to hear their loved one's voice in a crisis provides immense relief. The system also supports family monitoring through mobile apps, so caregivers can see the location, battery level, and status of the device at any time.

Another practical advantage is the lack of monthly fees with some modern systems. Traditional ADT medical alarms often require a long-term contract and a monthly monitoring fee. Newer models, like those from Familyr, operate on a prepaid or pay-once model, which can be easier on fixed incomes. The device itself may cost more upfront, but there are no ongoing charges for the monitoring service. That simplicity appeals to seniors who want to budget without surprises.

## **Fall Detection: A Feature Worth Prioritising**

Falls are the leading cause of injury for older adults, and the fear of falling keeps many seniors from living fully. Automatic fall detection uses sensors inside the pendant to recognise the impact and angle of a fall, then sends an alert without the user pressing a button. This is a major upgrade from the old button-only systems. Studies from organisations like St John and various aged care bodies show that rapid response after a fall reduces hospital stays and improves recovery outcomes. For a senior living alone, a fall that goes undetected for hours can turn a minor incident into a serious medical event.



But fall detection is not perfect. It can trigger false alarms from sudden movements or dropping the pendant, and it may miss a slow, sliding fall. The best systems allow you to adjust sensitivity or cancel an alert if it was a false alarm. When comparing “adl medical alarms” to newer options, ask whether the fall detection is automatic and how many false alarms the system typically generates. Also check if the pendant must be worn in a specific orientation or if it works reliably in any position. These details matter more than brand names.

## **GPS Tracking and the Freedom to Roam**

GPS tracking is another feature that sets modern systems apart. For a person with Alzheimer’s or dementia, the risk of wandering is constant. A pendant with built-in GPS lets caregivers see

the wearer's location in real time through a mobile app. If they wander outside a designated safe zone, the system can send an alert. This capability goes beyond what any traditional landline-based system can offer. It also supports an active lifestyle: seniors can go on nights out, attend community events, or simply take a walk without losing the safety net. The pendant is waterproof, so it can be worn in the shower or while swimming, which is when many accidents at home occur.

Battery backup is critical for any device that relies on cellular connectivity. A good medical alert system will last at least 24 hours on a single charge, and some last several days. The pendant should also be comfortable to wear all day and night. If it is too bulky or heavy, users will take it off, defeating the purpose. Look for a pendant that is lightweight, has a smooth shape, and comes with a lanyard or clip option for those who prefer not to wear it around the neck.

## **Making the Right Choice for Your Family**

There is no universal best system; the right choice depends on the senior's health, habits, and living situation. For someone who rarely leaves the house, is fully mobile, and has a strong support network nearby, a traditional ADT-style system may be perfectly adequate. The brand reliability and established monitoring network are real advantages. But for a person who is active, lives alone, has cognitive challenges, or whose family lives in a different city, the extra features of a modern personal alarm with GPS, fall detection, and two-way calling become almost essential.



When I talk to families considering “adl medical alarms,” I encourage them to think about the worst-case scenario: if a fall happens at 2 a.m. in the backyard, will the system work? Will it detect the fall automatically? Can a family member be notified immediately? Those questions often lead them to a newer system. The technology has matured, and the prices have come down. In New Zealand, providers like Familyr have made these advanced features accessible without locking families into contracts. The peace of mind that comes from knowing your mum or dad can press a button and speak to a real person, anywhere, anytime, is hard to put a price on.

Ultimately, the best medical alert system is the one your loved one will actually wear and use. If the pendant is comfortable, the features match their lifestyle, and the family can stay involved through mobile apps, the safety net becomes real. That is the goal: not just a device in the house, but a reliable connection to help when it matters most.