



An Extended Guide · No. 1685

Setting Up Emergency SOS & Medical ID on a Wearable

Step-by-step on Apple Watch and iPhone, with
the Pixel Watch and Galaxy Watch equivalents

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! Read this first — helpful gadgets, not medical devices

A quick, important note before we start. The rings, watches, and earbuds in this guide are everyday consumer gadgets, not medical equipment, and I am a tech helper, not a doctor or a nurse. What follows is plain-English general information to help you understand and set up these devices — it is not medical advice, and it cannot replace your doctor. A wearable can be a helpful extra set of eyes, but it can also miss things or raise a false alarm, so never ignore how you actually feel because of what a gadget says. If you have symptoms or a health worry, call your doctor, and in an emergency call 911. This guide is general information, not medical advice. Emergency SOS and Medical ID help responders reach you and know the basics — they don't replace calling 911 yourself when you can. In an emergency, call 911.

Set it up on a calm day, use it on a bad one

Emergency SOS and Medical ID are two of the most useful things a watch or phone can do — and they only help if they are set up beforehand.

I'm Bill, and I run Bill's Home Tech here in Portage County, Ohio. I've spent 30+ years helping people feel at home with their technology, patiently and in plain language. I'm a tech helper, not a doctor, and I sell no devices, so this is just careful, honest setup help.

We'll set up Emergency SOS and Medical ID on an Apple Watch and iPhone, then look at the Pixel Watch and Samsung Galaxy Watch. Menu names shift with software updates, so I'll give you the general path and what to look for.

★ I'll do it with you

This is one of my favorite visits, because it leaves a family with real peace of mind. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042.

The whole guide, on one page

If you remember only a handful of things, let it be these.

- Emergency SOS lets you call emergency services and alert your emergency contacts from your watch or phone, often with a button press.
- Medical ID puts key information — conditions, allergies, medicines, contacts — where responders can see it from the lock screen.
- On Apple devices, your emergency contacts come from your Medical ID.
- Fall detection and crash detection can call for help automatically on supported devices.
- Practice using the countdown and cancel, but never by really dialing 911.
- Keep the information current; old medicines and phone numbers can mislead.
- Tell your contacts they are on the list, and what to expect.

! Do not test by calling 911

Use the cancel step and the practice tips in this guide. A real test call ties up emergency lines and can send responders to your door.

What SOS and Medical ID actually are

Two separate tools that work well together.

Emergency SOS

A quick way to call emergency services without unlocking or dialing. It can also text your emergency contacts and share your location.

Medical ID

A small card of information stored on your phone or watch that first responders and bystanders can view from the lock screen, even if the phone is locked. It is only as useful as what you put in it.

Medical ID is not secret

Anyone holding the phone can view the lock-screen version. Include what helps responders, and skip things you would not want a stranger to read.

Before you start: a quick checklist

Five minutes of gathering makes setup go smoothly.

- Update the phone and watch to current software.
- Make sure the watch is paired to the phone and has a charge.
- Write down your medicines, doses, allergies and conditions.
- Choose two or three emergency contacts and confirm their numbers.
- Ask each contact whether they are willing to be listed.
- Know your doctor's name and, if you like, your blood type.

If you aren't sure about a medicine name or dose, read the pharmacy label or ask your pharmacist. Please don't guess.

A short list beats a long one

Responders are in a hurry. Put the essentials first: conditions, allergies and medicines that matter.

Apple: setting up Medical ID on your iPhone

On Apple devices, Medical ID is the foundation, and the watch uses it.

- Open the Health app on the iPhone and tap your picture, then Medical ID.
- Tap Edit (or Get Started) and fill in your details: conditions, allergies and reactions, medications, and your information.
- Add emergency contacts and the relationship for each.
- Turn on Show When Locked so responders can see it from the lock screen.
- Turn on Emergency Access if you want it reachable from the emergency screen.
- Tap Done and review it once more.

Menu names change between software versions. If you do not see an item, use the search in Settings or call me.

★ Your watch gets contacts from here

On an Apple Watch, the emergency contacts come from your Medical ID, so do this step first.

Apple Watch: Emergency SOS

Next, learn the gesture that calls for help from your wrist.

- Press and hold the side button until the Emergency SOS slider appears.
- Keep holding and the watch begins a countdown, then calls emergency services.
- Or drag the Emergency SOS slider to call right away.
- After the call, the watch texts your emergency contacts and shares your location.
- In the Watch app on the iPhone, look under Emergency SOS for options.

Hold-to-call can be turned off or on in settings. If you or someone you love tends to press buttons by accident, ask me to look at that setting.

! Know how to cancel

If you start a call by mistake, stay on the line and tell the dispatcher you are okay. Do not just hang up.

Apple Watch: fall detection and crash detection

These features can call for help when you cannot.

Fall detection can notice a hard fall and tap your wrist. If you do not respond and seem immobile, the watch can call emergency services and message your emergency contacts. For people past a certain age, it may turn on automatically when the age is entered at setup. Crash detection on supported devices does something similar after a severe car crash.

You can find and change the fall detection choice in the Watch app on the iPhone under Emergency SOS. Options typically include only during workouts, or always on.

Always on suits many folks

If falls are a concern, ask your doctor, and consider the setting that stays on all day rather than only in workouts. Ask me if you want help.

iPhone: Emergency SOS and crash detection

The iPhone has its own SOS shortcut, useful if the watch is off.

- Look in Settings under Emergency SOS for the options.
- A press-and-hold of the side button plus a volume button usually brings up the Emergency SOS slider on many models.
- Choose whether the countdown plays a sound, and check Call After Countdown options.
- Review the Emergency Contacts and Crash Detection choices on that screen.
- On supported iPhones, there is also satellite help when you have no signal.

The exact button combination differs by model, so check Apple's support page for your iPhone or have me show you.

No signal, no problem on some models

Some newer iPhones can reach emergency help by satellite outdoors with a clear view of the sky. Check Apple's current page for your model.

Pixel Watch: Emergency SOS and safety features

Google keeps the safety features together in a Safety and Emergency area.

- On the watch, open Settings and look for Safety and Emergency.
- Turn on Emergency SOS and choose how you want to start it.
- Pressing the crown five or more times typically opens the SOS screen.
- Add emergency contacts and your medical information there or in the Google app.
- Turn on fall detection if your model offers it.

Google has changed how SOS is triggered, including an option to place the call after a short countdown without extra steps. Check your watch's settings for what your version offers.

Cellular models can call on their own

A Pixel Watch with cellular can place the call without your phone nearby; a Wi-Fi-only model relies on the phone.

Samsung Galaxy Watch: SOS and fall detection

Samsung sets this up through the Galaxy Wearable app on your phone.

- Open the Galaxy Wearable app and look under watch settings for Safety and Emergency.
- Add emergency contacts and turn on the SOS option.
- Pressing the Home (power) key several times quickly typically sends an SOS message to your contacts.
- Turn on hard fall detection in the same area if your model supports it.
- Add your medical information so it is available to responders.

Samsung's menu names and button actions can change, so check their current support page for your model, or call me.

! Check what the SOS does

Some options message contacts only; others also call emergency services. Read the description for each setting so there are no surprises.

The three side by side

The same ideas, with different names for the buttons.

	Apple Watch	Pixel Watch	Galaxy Watch
Start SOS	Hold the side button	Press the crown repeatedly	Press the Home key repeatedly
Where to set up	Watch app and Health	Safety and Emergency	Galaxy Wearable app
Medical info	Medical ID in Health	Medical info in Safety	Medical info in the app
Fall detection	Yes, supported models	Yes, supported models	Yes, supported models
Needs phone nearby	Unless cellular	Unless cellular	Unless cellular

Wi-Fi-only watches lean on the phone

Without cellular, a watch usually needs your phone nearby or a Wi-Fi connection to place a call. Know which you own.

Choosing and briefing emergency contacts

A contact is only helpful if they answer, and know why they got a text.

- Pick people who live nearby or are usually reachable.
- Choose more than one, in case the first is busy or asleep.
- Tell each person they are on your list and what a message will look like.
- Make sure their numbers are current and saved correctly.
- Decide what you want them to do: call you, call a neighbor, or come over.

Consider adding a neighbor as a contact, since they may be closest. Ask first, and let them know how to reach your family.

★ A five-minute family call

A quick phone call saying 'you're on my emergency list' saves a lot of confusion later.

What to put in Medical ID

Responders need the essentials quickly. Less is often more.

Helpful to include

- Medical conditions, such as diabetes or a heart condition.
- Allergies and the reaction, especially to medicines.
- Current medicines, including blood thinners.
- Any implants or devices, such as a pacemaker.
- Your emergency contacts and your doctor.

Better left out

- Passwords, PINs, or account numbers.
- Anything private you wouldn't want a stranger to read.

! Out-of-date info can mislead

Update Medical ID after any change in medicine or health. Wrong information can be worse than none.

Setting it up for yourself or for someone you love

Setup looks a little different depending on who is doing it.

If you set it up for yourself

You know your history best, which makes this quick.

- Set aside a calm half hour with the phone and watch.
- Gather your medicine list and a pen before you begin.
- Tell your contacts when you are done.
- Revisit it twice a year and after any health change.

If you are helping a parent or loved one

You want it right, and you want them to feel in charge.

- Sit with them, and let them tap the screen when possible.
- Use their own pharmacy list rather than memory.
- Practice the cancel step together so nothing feels scary.
- Agree on who gets alerts, and make sure they know it.

★ I can help with either

Whether it is your own watch or Mom's, I'll walk through every step. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042.

Practicing without dialing 911

You want to know how it works before you need it. Here is how to practice safely.

- Start the SOS gesture, then use the cancel or end-call option before it connects.
- On Apple Watch, you can usually cancel during the countdown; on others, look for a cancel button.
- If a call connects by mistake, stay on and tell the dispatcher it was an accident.
- Send a text to a contact to say 'I'm practicing, don't worry'.
- Read the on-screen text for each step; do not rush through it.

A few minutes of rehearsal helps you act calmly later. Keep the practice short and pause at the point where the call would begin.

! Never place a real test call

Do not call 911 to try the feature. If you need confidence, ask me to rehearse the steps with you.

Stopping accidental alarms

Accidents happen, especially with a button on your wrist.

- Learn the cancel gesture for your watch and rehearse it.
- Check that your sleeve or a cuff doesn't press the side button.
- Review whether hold-to-call is turned on, and if it should be.
- Tell family that an accidental call can happen, and what you will do.
- Stay on the line if a call connects and say it was a mistake.

Dispatchers prefer a short 'sorry, accident' call to a mystery hang-up that makes them send someone to check on you.

Wipe the screen if it acts up

Water, sweat or gloves can make a watch touch screen act odd. Dry it and try again, and ask me if it keeps happening.

Does it work away from home?

Safety features are for everywhere, not only the living room.

A watch with cellular generally works wherever your carrier has signal. A Wi-Fi-only watch needs the paired phone close by or a Wi-Fi network. In a car, in the yard or on a walk, ask: does my watch still reach help, and does my phone come with me?

Traveling to another country can change which numbers reach emergency services and which features are available. Check before a trip, and tell your contacts when you will be away.

! Low battery means low protection

A dead watch is a silent watch. Make charging a daily habit, and carry the charger when you travel.

Privacy and scams around safety features

Safety features hold sensitive information, so a little care helps.

- Use a passcode on the phone and watch.
- Do not put passwords or financial details in Medical ID.
- Be suspicious of any caller who asks about your 'SOS subscription' or wants payment to 'activate' emergency features. Built-in SOS does not work that way.
- Only your own watch and phone should ask you to confirm an SOS.

Built-in Emergency SOS on a watch or phone does not need a payment to a stranger. If someone calls about it, hang up and call me or the maker.

! Beware of 'activation fee' calls

Scammers imitate alert companies. Hang up, look up the real company yourself, and call the number you find.

Keeping it up to date

A good setup quietly goes stale unless you check it.

- Update the watch and phone when updates are offered.
- Review Medical ID every few months and after any health change.
- Confirm contact numbers still work.
- Check the fall detection setting after any software update.
- Keep the watch charged and worn.
- Replace the band if it no longer fits well.

Put a repeating reminder on your calendar. It takes five minutes and keeps the whole safety net tight.

Pair it with a habit

Many folks review it when they change a clock for the seasons, or on a birthday. Pick whichever you will remember.

Where this fits with our other guides

A few other guides go deeper on pieces of this topic.

- **Apple Watch fall detection & SOS:** more on Apple's version of these tools.
- **Phones with medical alert & SOS:** options for people who prefer a phone.
- **Fall Detection in 2026: Can a Ring Do It?:** watch vs pendant vs ring.
- **Heart-Rate, ECG & Afib Alerts on Wearables:** what the heart features do.
- **Sharing Wearable Health Data With Your Doctor & Family, Safely:** privacy and sharing.

If the wearer does not like a watch, a monitored pendant or a phone built for safety may fit better, and those guides explain why.

Pick the tool the person will use

A feature on a device that lives in a drawer helps no one. Comfort wins.

Common Questions

The questions I hear most about SOS and Medical ID.

Q: Can anyone read my Medical ID?

If Show When Locked is on, someone holding the phone can see it from the emergency screen. That is the point, so include only what you are comfortable with responders seeing.

Q: Does my watch need a cellular plan for SOS?

Not always. Without cellular, it usually relies on the paired phone or Wi-Fi. A cellular model can call on its own if your carrier has signal.

Q: What if my contacts don't answer?

That is why you list more than one. Emergency services are still called directly; contacts are an extra layer.

Q: Will SOS work if I'm not conscious?

Fall and crash detection are designed to call when you can't, but they are not perfect. Keep a layered plan and call 911 yourself when you can.

Q: Can I practice without calling 911?

Yes. Start the gesture, then cancel before it connects, or ask me to rehearse with you.

★ Want it set up right?

Call or text me at (330) 200-8042 and we'll do it together, step by step.

You don't have to do this alone

You just have to remember that a friendly, patient person is one call away.

I hope this guide made Emergency SOS and Medical ID on a wearable feel a little less daunting and a lot more doable. Keep it in a drawer with your other home papers, come back to a page whenever you need it, and don't worry about memorizing anything.

When you'd rather have a hand, that's exactly what I do. I come to your home, work at your pace, and never make you feel rushed or silly for asking. A first visit is a flat \$99, and for the parts that don't need me on-site I can often help right on your screen for \$49. Every visit comes with a 30-day, come-back-free guarantee. I'm a tech helper, not a doctor, an audiologist, or your pharmacist — for a medical question, a hearing test, or anything about your health, I'll gladly help you get set up, but the right professional is the one to answer it, and I'll help you line that person up.

★ Bill's Home Tech — real help, close to home

Call or text me at (330) 200-8042, or visit BillsHomeTech.com. Serving Atwater and all of Portage County. 30+ years of patient, plain-English tech help — and if you're ever not 100% happy with a visit, I'll make it right or refund it. That's a promise. — Bill

SOS on Three Watches

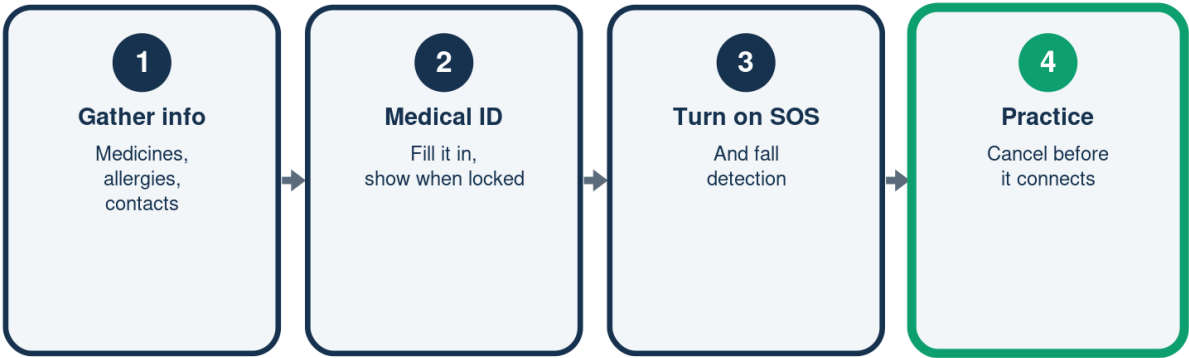
Same idea, different buttons

	Apple	Pixel	Galaxy
Start SOS	Hold side button	Crown, 5+ presses	Home key, quick
Set up in	Watch app, Health	Safety & Emergency	Galaxy Wearable
Fall detect	Supported models	Supported models	Supported models

Menu names change -- check your maker's current page.

Setting Up Safely

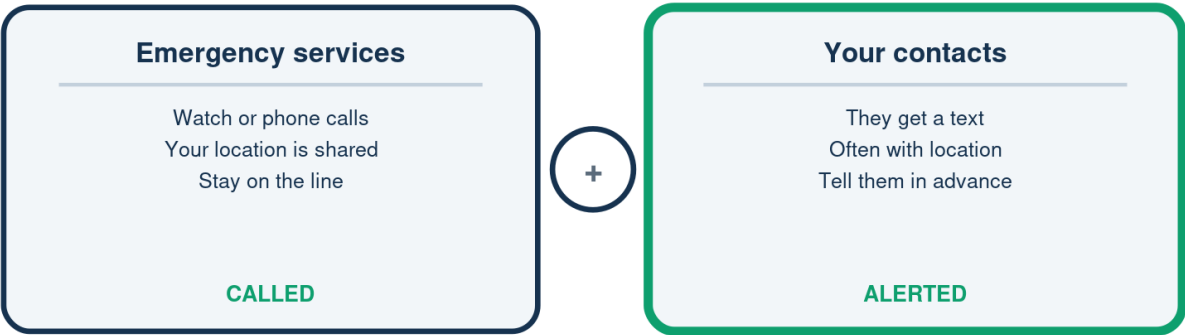
A calm order that works on any watch



Set it up on a calm day, use it on a bad one.

What Happens When SOS Starts

A call and a message go out together

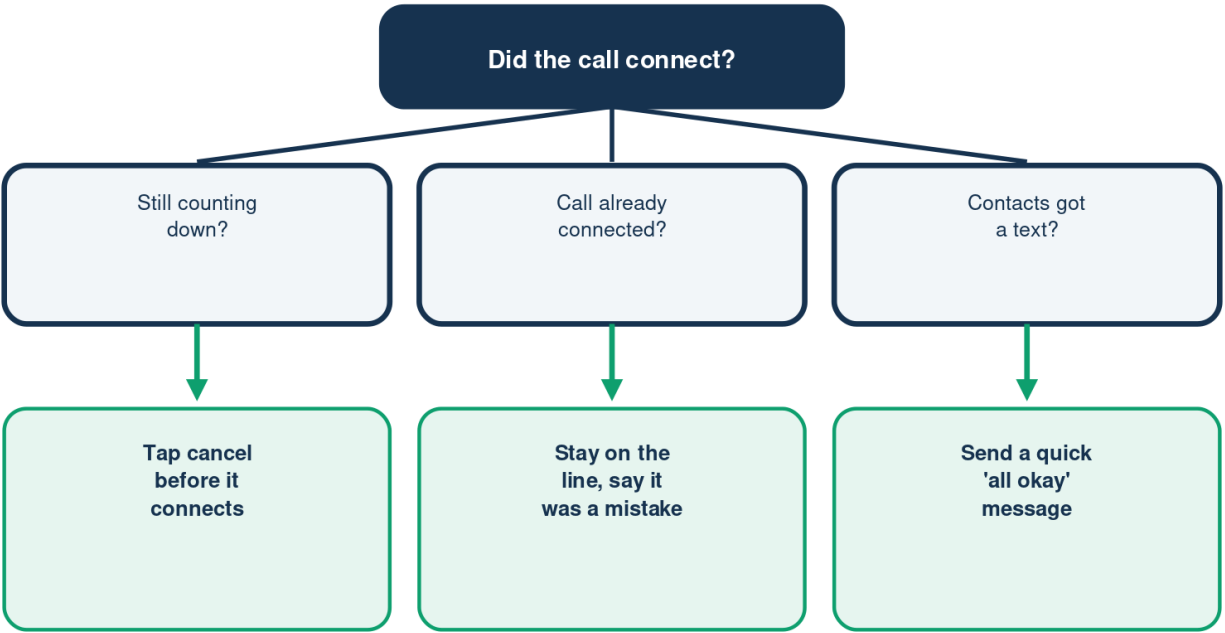


Practice the cancel step -- never test with a real 911 call.

Illustration - a schematic, not to scale. Your setup may differ.

I Started SOS by Accident

Stay calm -- here is what to do



Never just hang up -- dispatchers may send someone to check.

Illustration - a schematic, not to scale. Your setup may differ.



Need a Real Person?

You do not have to remember all of it.
You just have to remember you can call.
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Prefer help without a visit?

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A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill.

I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that comes from using these guides. Thanks for reading, and stay safe out there.

— *Bill*



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