BILL'S HOME TECH
Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

BILL'S COMPLETE MANUALS

Medical Alert & Fall Detection

Help at the press of a button — pendants, watches, and mobile devices, explained in plain English

An honest, plain-English guide to staying safe and independent

Peace of mind, one button away

Written for you by Bill — Bill's Home Tech

(330) 200-8042 · BillsHomeTech.com

Pendants, watches & mobile devices · facts current November 2026

What's Inside

This is your guide to medical alert and fall-detection devices. Read it in any order and at your own pace — there's no rush and no test. It explains, honestly and in plain English, how each kind of device works, what it does and doesn't do, and how to choose, set up, and live with one well. Nothing here is a sales pitch — just clear help so you can make a confident decision. Remember: these devices are a wonderful backup, but in any real emergency where you can reach a phone, calling **911** is always right.

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PART 1

Why This Matters and How It Works

What a medical alert really is, how a call for help actually unfolds, and the one big choice — a monitoring center or not — that shapes everything else. Start here.

CHAPTER 1

A Note from Bill

Hello, and welcome. If you're reading this, chances are you — or someone you love — have started thinking about that quiet worry a lot of us carry: *what happens if I fall, or take ill, and can't get to a phone?* It's not a comfortable thing to sit with. But I want you to know that thinking about it isn't morbid or defeatist. It's one of the wisest, most loving things a person can do, and this book is here to help you do it calmly and well.

I'm Bill. Helping folks feel at home with their technology is what I do every day, right here in Portage County, and I wrote this the same way I'd sit at your kitchen table: patiently, in plain English, no rushing and no fancy words. If I ever use a term you don't know, I'll stop and explain it right then — you won't have to look anything up.

This is about freedom, not frailty

Here's the thing I most want you to hear. A medical alert device is not an admission that you're old or fragile. It's the opposite. It's the thing that lets you keep gardening, keep living alone, keep taking your walk and your shower and your independence — **because** you know help is one button away if you ever need it. Many people find it's the device that lets them stay in their own home years longer. That's not giving in. That's winning.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this really does for you

The point of all this is a single, enormous feeling: **peace of mind** — yours and your family's. You get to stop bracing for the worst and go back to enjoying your days, knowing that if something does happen, a calm voice and real help are a button-press away. That freedom is worth a great deal.

An honest book about a serious subject

Because this is about your safety, I'm going to be straight with you throughout. I won't oversell any gadget or promise you that any device catches every fall or prevents every bad outcome — none of them can, and anyone who tells you otherwise isn't being honest. What I *can* do is explain clearly how each kind works, what it does and doesn't do, and how to choose and use one well. You'll make a confident, informed decision — that's the goal.

STAY SAFE

First, the most important thing in this whole book

A medical alert device is a wonderful tool, but it does not replace **911**. In any real emergency where you can reach a phone, calling 911 directly is always right. These devices exist mainly for the moments when you *can't* get to a phone — when you've fallen and can't reach it, or you're too unwell to dial. Think of them as a second, always-on way to summon the same help.

— Bill

CHAPTER 2

What a Medical Alert Device Actually Is

Let's clear away the mystery, because the idea is simpler than the advertisements make it sound.

A help button you wear

At its heart, a medical alert is a **button you wear** — usually as a pendant around your neck or a band on your wrist — that calls for help when you press it. You don't have to find a phone, dial a number, or explain where you live. You press the button, and help is set in motion. That's the whole beautiful idea.

What happens when you press it

With most systems, pressing the button opens a **two-way conversation**: a speaker and microphone in the device (or in a base unit nearby) let you talk with a person who can help, hands-free, even if you're on the floor across the room. They find out what's wrong and send the right help — an ambulance, or a call to your daughter — depending on the situation. We'll walk through exactly how that unfolds in Chapter 4.

The common shapes it comes in

Form	What it is
Pendant	Worn on a cord around the neck. The most common. Easy to reach, stays with you.
Wristband	Worn like a watch. Good if a neck cord bothers you; always on your arm.
Base unit	A small box that sits in your home (often by the phone), with a loud speaker and a big button. The pendant talks to it.
All-in-one mobile unit	A single small device you carry or wear that has everything built in — button, speaker, and GPS — so it works away from home too.
Smartwatch	A watch (like an Apple Watch) that can double as a safety device, with fall detection and an emergency call feature.

GOOD TO KNOW

It is not the same as a smartwatch's health features

A fitness watch that counts your steps is a lovely thing, but it is not automatically a medical alert. What makes something a true medical alert is that one press reliably brings *help* — either a monitoring center or a 911 call. Some watches do offer this (we'll cover the Apple Watch in Part 3); many don't. Don't assume; check.

CHAPTER 3

The Big Choice: Monitored or Not

Before we look at specific devices, you need to understand the single most important difference between them. It's not the brand or the price — it's whether the device is **monitored**. This one choice shapes everything, so let's take it slowly.

Monitored: a real person answers, day and night

A **monitored** system connects you, when you press the button, to a **monitoring center** — a building staffed around the clock by trained agents whose only job is to answer alerts. A real person comes on the line within seconds, talks with you, figures out what you need, and dispatches help: an ambulance, or a call to a neighbor or family member you've listed. They stay with you until help arrives.

This is what most people picture when they think "medical alert," and for good reason. Monitored systems charge a **monthly fee** for this service, because there are real people standing by for you at three in the morning. The fee varies by company and plan.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Why monitoring is worth considering

The great gift of a monitored system is that you never have to manage the emergency yourself. You press one button, and a calm professional takes over — assessing, dispatching, and staying on the line. If you've fallen and you're frightened and hurting, having someone's voice right there, handling everything, is an enormous comfort.

Unmonitored: the button calls a person you chose

An **unmonitored** system skips the monitoring center. Instead, pressing the button dials **911** directly, or calls a list of family and friends you've programmed in, one after another. There's usually **no monthly fee** — you buy the device and that's it.

The trade-off is real: there's no trained agent in the middle. If it dials 911, you're connected to the emergency operator directly, which is fine if you can speak — but a 911 operator can't check in on you the way a monitoring agent can, and a device calling 911 automatically after a fall, when you can't talk, gives the operator very little to go on. If it calls your family, help depends on someone answering.

	Monitored	Unmonitored
Who answers	Trained agent, 24/7	911, or your family list
Monthly fee	Yes	Usually none
Handles the emergency for you	Yes	No — you or 911 do
Best when	You want full, hands-off help	You want no monthly cost and have reachable family

FROM BILL

There's no single right answer — only the right answer for you

Plenty of people sleep easier with a monitored system and happily pay the monthly fee for it. Others, often with family close by, do fine with an unmonitored device or an Apple Watch. Neither choice is foolish. Later in this book I'll help you weigh it for your own situation — and if you'd like to talk it through, that's exactly what I'm here for: (330) 200-8042.

PART 2

The Kinds of Devices

In-home systems, on-the-go mobile units, and how fall detection actually works — in plain English, with the honest strengths and limits of each.

CHAPTER 4

How a Call for Help Unfolds

Let's walk through exactly what happens, start to finish, when you press the button on a typical monitored system. Knowing this takes away the fear of the unknown and helps you picture using it.

Step by step, with a monitoring center

1. **You press the button.** On a pendant, wristband, or base unit. One firm press is all it takes.
2. **The device connects to the monitoring center.** You'll usually hear a tone or a message like "connecting you now." This takes a few seconds — it can feel long when you're anxious, so wait for it.
3. **An agent comes on the line.** A real, trained person greets you by name and asks what's happening. You talk to them hands-free through the speaker — you don't need to hold anything.
4. **They decide what you need.** If it's a true emergency, they dispatch an ambulance to your address, which they already have on file. If you just need a hand up, they can call a neighbor or family member on your list instead.
5. **They stay with you.** A good agent keeps talking with you, calmly, until help arrives at your door.

GOOD TO KNOW

What if you press it by accident?

You simply tell the agent "I'm sorry, I pressed it by mistake, I'm fine" and they'll wish you well and let you go. False alarms happen to everyone and are no trouble at all. **Never** hesitate to press the button for fear of bothering someone — a false alarm is always better than a real emergency with no call.

What if you can't speak?

This is the heart of why these devices matter. If you press the button but **can't answer** — you've fainted, you're in too much pain, you can't reach the speaker — a good monitoring center treats that silence as a serious sign and sends help to your address anyway. They don't need you to talk them through it. That safety net is precisely what you're paying the monthly fee for.

CHAPTER 5

In-Home Systems

The classic medical alert is an **in-home system**: a base unit that lives in your house plus a pendant or wristband you wear. It's designed for protecting you where you spend most of your time — at home.

How it's set up

A small **base unit** — about the size of a tissue box — sits somewhere central, often the living room or by the bed. It has a big help button and a loud, clear speaker. You wear a lightweight **pendant** that talks wirelessly to that base. Press the pendant anywhere in or near the house, and the base unit does the talking to the monitoring center.

Landline or cellular

The base unit needs a way to reach the outside world. Older systems plug into a **telephone landline**. Newer ones use a built-in **cellular** connection (the same kind of signal a cell phone uses), so they work even if you don't have a home phone. If you've cut the landline — as many folks have — be sure to choose a cellular model. A company can tell you if your area has good cellular coverage.

The range question

A pendant only works within a certain **range** of its base unit — enough to cover a typical home and usually a bit of the yard, though the exact distance varies by system and by the walls in between. Step too far — out to the back garden or down the street — and the pendant can't reach the base. That limit is the main reason the mobile systems in the next chapter exist.

HEADS UP

Mind the edges of your coverage

If you love being out in the garden, at the mailbox, or in a detached garage, test how far your pendant reaches during the trial period (Part 6 shows you how). If your favorite spots are out of range, you may want a mobile system instead — or in addition.

Battery and backup

The base unit stays plugged into the wall, and good ones have a **backup battery** inside so they keep working for hours during a power cut — an important feature worth asking about.

The pendant runs on a long-life battery that can last a very long time (often a year or more) before it needs changing, and the system warns you when it's getting low.

CHAPTER 6

On-the-Go Mobile Systems

If you're active — out shopping, walking, visiting, driving — an in-home system can't follow you. A **mobile** medical alert can. It's built to protect you anywhere you go.

Everything in one small device

A mobile system is a single, all-in-one unit — a small pendant or a little puck you clip on or wear. It has the button, the speaker and microphone, a **cellular** connection, and **GPS** all built in. There's no base unit and no range limit to a house — it works wherever there's cell signal, which is most places.

What GPS adds

GPS (the same location technology in a car's navigation) lets the device know *where you are*. So if you press the button at the park or the grocery store, the monitoring center can see your location and send help to the right spot — even if you don't know the address or can't say it. For anyone who's out and about on their own, that's a real safeguard.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

A mobile system means the worry doesn't have to stay home when you leave. You can take your walk, run your errands, and visit friends knowing that the same one-press help reaches you out there too. For independent, active folks, that's freedom you can feel.

The one thing to remember: charging

Because a mobile unit carries its own power everywhere, its battery doesn't last for months like an in-home pendant's. You'll need to **recharge it regularly** — for many units, every few days — by setting it on a little charging cradle, much like a cell phone. Building that into a routine (we'll cover an easy habit in Part 6) is the key to it always being ready.

	In-home system	Mobile system
Where it protects you	In and around your home	Anywhere with cell signal
Knows your location	Your home address (on file)	Yes — GPS, wherever you are
Battery	Pendant lasts months+	Recharge every few days
Best for	Mostly-at-home life	Active, out-and-about life

TIP

Many people use both

Some systems offer an in-home base *and* a mobile unit together, or you can simply choose the one that fits how you actually live. There's no prize for picking the fancier one — the best system is the one that covers the places you really go.

CHAPTER 7

Fall Detection — The Honest Truth

Fall detection is the feature people ask about most, and it's genuinely valuable — but it's also the one most often oversold. Here's the straight story so you know exactly what you're getting.

What it does

A device with fall detection contains tiny motion sensors that watch for the sudden sharp movement and stop of a **hard fall**. If it thinks you've fallen, it calls for help **on its own** — without you pressing anything. That's the whole promise, and it's a powerful one: it's the safety net for the worst case, where a fall knocks you out or leaves you unable to reach the button.

What it can't do — and why that's important

Here's the honest part the ads skip: **no fall detection catches every fall.** The sensors look for a particular pattern of motion. A hard, sudden fall is most likely to be caught. But a **slow slump** — sliding gradually down a wall or easing to the floor — may not look like a "fall" to the sensor and can be missed. It's a backup, not a guarantee.

STAY SAFE

Fall detection is a backstop — the button is the real tool

Treat automatic fall detection as a bonus safety net for when you *can't* press the button, never as a replacement for it. Whenever you're able, **press the button yourself** — it's faster and more reliable than any sensor. If a device maker implies fall detection means you never need to press anything, be skeptical. The honest makers say exactly what I'm saying here.

False alarms go both ways

Fall detection can also go off when you *haven't* fallen — setting a bag down hard, a vigorous clap, a bump. That's harmless; you simply tell the agent you're fine, or cancel the alert during the few-second countdown most devices give you before they call. A few false alarms are a small price for the protection, and far better than a missed real fall.

It usually costs a little extra

On most monitored systems, fall detection is an **optional add-on** for a few more dollars a month, and often requires wearing the *pendant* specifically (not a wristband), because the

neck position reads falls best. If fall detection matters to you, ask each company how theirs works and what it costs — the details differ.

PART 3

Your Apple Watch and iPhone as Safety Tools

If you already wear an Apple Watch or carry an iPhone, you may be carrying a capable safety device already. Here's how to switch on fall detection, Emergency SOS, and a Medical ID — step by step.

CHAPTER 8

The Apple Watch as a Safety Device

An **Apple Watch** is best known as a fitness and notification gadget, but recent models include genuine safety features: automatic **fall detection**, a one-button **Emergency SOS** call, and a **Medical ID** that shares your health details with responders. For some people, a watch they already wear is a fine safety tool.

How it's different from a monitored system

The key honest difference: an Apple Watch is **not monitored**. When it calls for help, it dials **911** and notifies your emergency contacts — there's no trained monitoring agent in the middle to assess the situation and stay with you. That's a real distinction. For many it's perfectly sufficient; for someone who wants that human safety net, a monitored system may suit better. Both are valid.

	Apple Watch	Monitored medical alert
Who it calls	911 + your emergency contacts	A 24/7 monitoring center
Monthly fee	None for these features	Yes
Needs charging	Daily	In-home: months; mobile: days
Also does	Lots (messages, heart rate, etc.)	One job, done simply

HEADS UP

A watch only protects you if it's charged and worn

An Apple Watch needs charging most days and does nothing sitting on the nightstand. If you'd forget to charge it or dislike wearing a watch, a dedicated medical alert — with its months-long pendant battery — may protect you more reliably. Be honest with yourself about what you'll actually keep on and charged.

Which models have which features

Apple's safety features arrived over several generations of watch. **Fall detection** is on the watch from Series 4 onward; **Crash Detection** (for car accidents) is on the newer models. Rather than trust my list over time, check which features your specific watch supports in its settings, or ask me and I'll confirm for your model. The setup steps below are much the same across recent watches.

CHAPTER 9

Turning On Fall Detection

If you have a supported Apple Watch, switching on fall detection takes about a minute. You can do it from the watch itself or, more comfortably, from the Watch app on your iPhone.

From your iPhone (the easier way)

1. On your iPhone, open the **Watch** app (its icon is a watch outline).
2. Tap **My Watch** at the bottom, then tap **Emergency SOS**.
3. Find **Fall Detection** and tap it.
4. Turn on **Fall Detection**. You may be offered "Always on" or "Only on during workouts" — for safety coverage all day, choose **Always on**.

From the watch itself

1. On the watch, open **Settings** (the gear icon), then tap **SOS**.
2. Tap **Fall Detection**.
3. Turn it on, and choose **Always on** for all-day coverage.

> GOOD TO KNOW
>
> **"Wrist Detection" must stay on**
>
> For the watch to place an emergency call automatically after a fall, a setting called **Wrist Detection** must be on (it usually is by default). If Wrist Detection is off, the watch won't make those automatic calls. You'll find it in the Watch app under Passcode. If unsure, leave it on — it's the normal setting.

What happens when the watch detects a fall

If your watch senses a hard fall and then notices you've been **still for about a minute**, it starts a 30-second countdown with an alarm and a tap on your wrist. If you're fine, you dismiss it. If you don't respond, it assumes you need help, calls emergency services, and shares your location and Medical ID. The same honest limit applies as with any device: it catches many hard falls, not all falls.

CHAPTER 10

Emergency SOS — Calling Help by Hand

Beyond automatic fall detection, your Apple Watch and iPhone both have **Emergency SOS** — a deliberate way to summon help fast when you know you need it. This one's worth practicing so your hands know it.

On the Apple Watch

Press and **hold the side button** (the flat button below the round crown). After a moment, a set of sliders appears; keep holding and the watch counts down and calls emergency services, or drag the **Emergency SOS** slider across. It calls 911, then can message your emergency contacts with your location.

On the iPhone

On most recent iPhones, press and **hold the side button and one volume button** together until the sliders appear, then drag **Emergency SOS** — or keep holding to start the automatic countdown. Older iPhones use a rapid press of the side button five times. Either way, it dials 911 and can alert your contacts.

> TIP
>
> **Practice the motion — but don't complete the call**
>
> It's smart to practice *finding and starting* the Emergency SOS press so it's second nature in a real moment — just stop and cancel before it actually dials, so you don't call 911 for practice. Do this a couple of times until your fingers remember it. In a scary moment, that muscle memory is gold.

Crash Detection, if your device has it

Newer iPhones and Apple Watches add **Crash Detection**, which senses a severe car accident and can call emergency services automatically, much like fall detection but for crashes. If you drive, it's a quiet extra layer of protection that needs no setup beyond keeping Emergency SOS features on.

CHAPTER 11

Your Medical ID and Emergency Contacts

This chapter may be the most valuable in Part 3, and it costs nothing. A **Medical ID** is a card inside your iPhone that holds your key health facts and emergency contacts — and it can be seen by paramedics and shared automatically during an emergency call. Everyone with an iPhone should set this up.

Why it matters so much

If you're hurt and can't speak, a paramedic can open your Medical ID from your locked phone or watch and instantly learn your allergies, medications, conditions, and who to call. When your device makes an emergency call, it can send that same information and your location automatically. It can genuinely change the care you get — and it takes five minutes to set up.

Setting up your Medical ID

1. On your iPhone, open the **Health** app (a white icon with a red heart).
2. Tap your **picture or initials** in the top-right corner.
3. Tap **Medical ID**, then **Get Started** or **Edit**.
4. Fill in what you're comfortable sharing: date of birth, medical conditions, allergies, medications, blood type, and your emergency contacts (tap **add emergency contact** and pick people from your address book).
5. Turn on **Show When Locked** so responders can see it without your passcode.
6. Turn on **Share During Emergency Call** so your info and location go out automatically when you call for help. Tap **Done** to save.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

A Medical ID means that even in your worst moment — unconscious, confused, unable to speak — the people helping you know your allergies, your medications, and who to phone. It's a small setup for a large safeguard, and it works alongside any other device you choose.

FROM BILL

I'm glad to set this up with you

The Medical ID and Emergency SOS features are among the most worthwhile things I help folks turn on, and they're free. If you'd like a hand getting them right — or just want to practice the SOS press until it feels easy — give me a call at **(330) 200-8042**. It's exactly the kind of visit I love to make.

PART 4

The Well-Known Systems

A plain look at the kinds of dedicated medical-alert services you'll see advertised — monitored pendant systems and simplified-phone companies like Lively — and what sets them apart.

CHAPTER 12

Dedicated Monitored Alert Systems

You've surely seen the commercials — the ones with the famous line about having fallen and needing help. **Life Alert** is the best-known name, but it's one of many companies offering dedicated, monitored medical alert systems. Let's talk about what this whole category is, without singling out any one brand as best.

What they all have in common

These companies build their entire business around one thing: a wearable button backed by a 24/7 monitoring center. Press it, a trained agent answers, help is dispatched. They offer in-home and mobile options, fall-detection add-ons, and waterproof pendants for the shower (where many falls happen). The service is the product, which is why they charge a monthly fee rather than just selling you a gadget.

How they differ from one another

Brands in this category compete on details worth comparing:

- **Contract terms:** some ask you to sign a long-term contract; others are month-to-month with no commitment. This matters a great deal — see the warning below.
- **Pricing structure:** monthly fees, equipment fees, activation fees, and the cost of add-ons like fall detection all vary. Ask for the *total* monthly cost with everything you want included.
- **Equipment:** pendant comfort, button size, speaker loudness, battery life, water resistance, and in-home range differ model to model.
- **Extras:** some offer caregiver apps that let family check your device's status, medication reminders, or location sharing.

HEADS UP

Read the contract before you sign anything

This is the one place I most want you to be careful. Some medical alert companies lock customers into **long contracts** with **cancellation fees** — which can be a real problem if your needs change or, sadly, if the person moves to care or passes away. Favor **month-to-month** plans with no long commitment and a clear cancellation policy. If a salesperson pressures you to sign today, that's a reason to slow down, not speed up.

SCAM ALERT

Watch for high-pressure and fake "free" offers

Medical alerts are, sadly, a field with some aggressive sales tactics and outright scams — robocalls claiming a "free" medical alert a relative ordered for you, or pushy pitches demanding your bank details now. A real company will happily send information and let you decide. **Never** give payment or bank information to someone who called *you* out of the blue. When in doubt, hang up and call me.

CHAPTER 13

Simplified-Phone Companies: Lively and the Like

Another path comes from companies that make **simplified phones for seniors** and build safety services around them. **Lively** — which makes the easy-to-use **Jitterbug** phones — is the most prominent. If a simple phone *and* a safety service in one place appeals to you, this is worth understanding.

Two ways in

Lively offers both a dedicated **mobile medical alert device** (a small wearable with a button, speaker, and GPS) and its **Jitterbug phones** (a big-button flip phone and a simplified smartphone) that include the same urgent-help feature. So you can get the safety service as a standalone pendant *or* built into a phone you'd carry anyway.

Urgent Response

Their monitored service, called **Urgent Response**, works like any monitored system: press the button (or the Urgent Response option on the phone), and you're connected to a trained agent who assesses the situation and sends help or calls your family. The wearable device also offers **fall detection** as an option (which, as always, requires wearing it as a pendant and costs a bit more), has built-in GPS, and is water-resistant for shower use.

GOOD TO KNOW

Good to know about simplified-phone systems

These appeal to people who want *one* simple device. If you'd like a phone that's genuinely easy to use *and* doubles as your safety line, a Jitterbug-style phone with Urgent Response can be a tidy all-in-one. If you already love your iPhone or Android, you may prefer a standalone pendant alongside it instead.

Caregiver features

Systems like these often include apps or services that let a family member — with your permission — check that your device is charged and working, see your location, or be notified if you call for help. For an adult child who worries from a distance, that shared peace of mind is a genuine benefit. You stay in control of what you share.

CHAPTER 14

Other Options Worth Knowing

The field is broader than the famous names. A few other avenues are worth a mention so your picture is complete — I won't vouch for specific brands, but you should know these exist.

Your phone or cable company's bundle

Some phone, internet, and home-security companies offer a medical alert add-on. These can be convenient if you already deal with the company, but compare the total cost and the contract terms against a dedicated provider before assuming the bundle is cheaper or better.

Smartwatch-based services

Besides the Apple Watch, some companies sell **smartwatches with built-in monitored response** — a watch that both tells time and connects to a monitoring center, with a cellular plan included. These suit people who want the look of a watch but the backing of a monitoring center. As always, check the monthly cost and how charging works.

Through your doctor, insurer, or local agency

It's well worth asking a few local questions, because help with cost may be available:

- Ask your **doctor** — they may recommend a system suited to your health, and a recommendation sometimes helps with coverage.
- Ask your **insurance plan**. Traditional Medicare generally does not cover medical alert systems, but some **Medicare Advantage** plans and some long-term-care policies include or discount them. Always verify current details directly with your plan.
- Ask your **local Area Agency on Aging** or senior center — many communities have programs that lend or subsidize alert devices for those who qualify.

FROM BILL

Let's sort the choices together

The number of companies and plans is genuinely dizzying, and the hard-sell advertising doesn't help. If you'd like an honest, unhurried second opinion — no sales pitch, because I don't sell these — call me at **(330) 200-8042**. We'll match your life and budget to the right kind of system, and I'll help you read the fine print before you commit a dime.

PART 5

Choosing the Right One for You

An honest, pressure-free way to narrow the field — the questions that actually matter, the fine print to check, and how to know when you've found your fit.

CHAPTER 15

Start With Your Life, Not the Gadget

The best system isn't the one with the flashiest features or the loudest commercial. It's the one that fits **how you actually live**. So before comparing any devices, answer a few gentle questions about your days.

Where do you spend your time?

- **Mostly at home?** An in-home system may be all you need, with its long battery life and simplicity.
- **Out and about often** — walks, errands, visiting, driving? Lean toward a **mobile** system with GPS, or a device that covers both.
- **Spend lots of time in the garden or a detached garage?** Check the in-home range carefully, or choose mobile.

Who's nearby, and how fast?

If you have family or neighbors close who can reach you quickly, an unmonitored device or an Apple Watch that alerts them may suffice. If you live alone with no one close, the 24/7 human backup of a **monitored** system carries more weight. Be realistic about who could truly get to you, and how soon.

Will you wear it — honestly?

A medical alert only works if it's **on your body**. The most common reason these fail is that the pendant sits in a drawer because it felt uncomfortable or looked "medical." Think about what you'd genuinely keep on all day and in the shower: a light pendant, a wristband, a watch? Comfort and looks aren't vanity here — they're what makes the device actually protect you.

STAY SAFE

The shower and the bedside are where falls happen

A great many serious falls happen in the **bathroom** and getting in or out of **bed** — often at night. So a device you'll wear in the shower (waterproof, not just "water-resistant" splash-proof) and keep on or within reach at night matters enormously. Ask specifically about shower use and nighttime coverage.

CHAPTER 16

The Questions to Ask Every Company

When you call or read about a system, these are the questions that separate a good fit from a costly mistake. Keep this page by the phone. A trustworthy company will answer every one clearly and without dodging.

Cost — get the whole picture

- What is the **total monthly cost** with everything I want (including fall detection)?
- Are there **equipment, activation, or shipping fees**?
- Is there a **contract**, or is it month-to-month? What's the **cancellation policy and any fee**?
- Do you offer a **risk-free trial period** and a **refund** if I'm not satisfied?

How it works

- Is it **monitored** by a 24/7 center, and where is that center? Is it a certified monitoring center?
- Does it use a **landline or cellular** connection — and is cellular coverage good at my address?
- What's the **in-home range**, and does the mobile unit use GPS?
- Is the pendant truly **waterproof for the shower**? How long does the battery last, and how will I know when it's low?

Fall detection and backup

- How does your **fall detection** work, what does it cost, and do you tell me honestly that it won't catch every fall?
- Does the base unit have a **battery backup** for power outages, and for how long?
- Can I list **family contacts**, and can a caregiver check the device's status?

TIP

A good company welcomes these questions

How a company responds to this list tells you as much as the answers. Patience and straight talk are good signs. Evasion, pressure, or a rush to take your payment are bad ones. You are interviewing *them* — take your time and trust your gut.

CHAPTER 17

Avoiding the Common Mistakes

A few predictable pitfalls catch people when choosing a medical alert. Knowing them ahead of time keeps you clear of the worst of them.

Buying from a pushy phone call

Reputable systems don't need to cold-call you with urgent, one-day-only deals. If pressure and urgency are the sales pitch, walk away and research on your own terms. The device is for *your* peace of mind, not the salesperson's commission.

Signing a long contract to "save" a little

A slightly lower monthly rate isn't worth being locked in for years with a stiff cancellation fee. Circumstances change. Month-to-month flexibility is usually worth a dollar or two more a month, many times over.

Choosing a device you won't wear

The fanciest system is useless in a drawer. If comfort or appearance will keep you from wearing it, that's the wrong device — full stop. Pick the one you'll actually keep on.

Forgetting about charging or batteries

A mobile unit that's dead because it wasn't charged, or a pendant with a battery no one replaced, protects no one. Match the device's upkeep to what you'll realistically keep up with — and set up the easy habits in the next part.

GOOD TO KNOW

"Good enough and worn" beats "perfect and ignored"

Don't let the search for the perfect system stop you from getting *a* system. A simple device you wear every day protects you far better than the ideal one you're still researching six months from now. Decide, start, and adjust later if needed.

FROM BILL

When you're close to deciding, call me

Right before you sign up is the perfect moment for a quick, no-charge sanity check. Read me the plan and the fine print over the phone — **(330) 200-8042** — and I'll flag anything that looks off: a sneaky contract, a missing feature, a cost that doesn't add up. A five-minute call can save a lot of regret.

PART 6

Setting It Up and Keeping It Ready

Getting your device working, wearing it so it actually protects you, and the simple monthly habit that makes sure it'll be there the day you need it.

CHAPTER 18

Setting Up Your New Device

A new medical alert arrives in the mail, and the box can look daunting. It needn't be — most are designed to be set up in minutes, and the company will walk you through it by phone if you ask. Here's the general shape of it.

For an in-home system

1. Unbox the **base unit** and the **pendant**. Set the base somewhere central — the living room or bedroom — where you'll hear its speaker from most of the house.
2. **Plug the base into the wall** (and into the phone jack, if it's a landline model). Give it a minute to power up and connect.
3. Charge or activate the **pendant** if the instructions say to.
4. **Call the company to activate** the service and confirm your address and contacts are correct on file. Many walk you through a first test call right then.
5. Do a **test** (next chapter) to be sure it all works before you rely on it.

For a mobile unit

1. **Charge it fully** first — set it on its charging cradle until the light says it's done.
2. **Activate the service** by phone, confirming your details.
3. Do a **test press** so you've heard how it connects and talked to an agent once.
4. Set up your **charging routine** (Chapter 20) so it never runs flat.

> TIP
> **Don't be shy about calling the company to help you set up**
> You're paying for a service, and a good one includes patient setup help over the phone. If anything is unclear, call them and have them stay on the line while you do it. There's no shame in it — it's exactly what their help line is for. Or, of course, call me.

Confirm your information is right

The most important part of setup isn't the gadget — it's making sure the monitoring center has your correct **address**, a **gate or lockbox code** if they'd need one to get in, your **key health details**, and your **family contacts** with current phone numbers. Help can only come fast if this information is accurate. Review it carefully, and update it whenever anything changes.

CHAPTER 19

Testing It — and Why You Must, Monthly

Here is a habit I want you to take as seriously as anything in this book: **test your device once a month.** A medical alert that quietly stopped working is worse than none, because you're trusting a safety net with a hole in it. Testing takes two minutes and removes all doubt.

How to run a test

1. Pick a calm moment — not the middle of the night.
2. **Press your help button**, just as you would in a real event.
3. When the agent answers, say clearly: **"This is a test. I'm fine — I'm just testing my device."**
4. Let them confirm they can hear you well and that your information is current. Ask them to confirm the test went through on their end.
5. Thank them, and you're done. That's a working safety net confirmed for another month.

> GOOD TO KNOW
>
> **The agents expect test calls — they're glad you do it**
>
> Monitoring centers *want* you to test. A test call is never a bother, and it's the single best way to catch a dead battery, a range problem, or a wrong address before it matters. Put it on the calendar — the first of the month, say — and make it routine.

What a test can reveal

- That the **button and connection work** and reach a real agent.
- That the **speaker and microphone** are loud and clear enough for you to be heard from across the room.
- That your **address and contacts are still correct** on file.
- On a mobile unit, that the **battery and GPS** are doing their job.

Test the range, too

For an in-home system, once in a while do a test press from the **far corners** of where you spend time — the back bedroom, the bathroom, the edge of the yard — to confirm the pendant still reaches the base from there. Better to learn a blind spot during a calm test than during a real fall.

CHAPTER 20

Wearing It and Keeping It Charged

The finest device protects you only when it's on your body and powered. Two small habits make that automatic.

Wear it — all the time

The goal is for the device to become something you simply don't take off, like a wedding ring or a watch. That means wearing it:

- **In the shower and bath** (if it's waterproof) — one of the most important places of all.
- **At night**, or kept right at the bedside within instant reach, since many falls happen getting up.
- **Around the house and yard**, not just when you "might need it" — falls don't announce themselves.

STAY SAFE

A pendant in a drawer has never helped anyone

If you find yourself taking it off because it's uncomfortable or you forget, treat that as a signal to switch to a style you *will* wear — a wristband instead of a pendant, say. The device you keep on is the only one that works. This is worth getting right.

Build a charging habit (for mobile units)

If your device needs regular charging, tie it to something you already do every day so you never forget:

- Charge it while you **eat breakfast**, or during your **evening TV show** — a predictable daily slot.
- Keep the **charging cradle somewhere you'll see it**, like the kitchen counter, not tucked away.
- Many devices **beep or flash** when the battery is low — never ignore that warning; charge it right then.
- If a family member can get a **low-battery alert** through a caregiver app, set that up as a backstop.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What these habits do for you

Wearing it always and keeping it charged turn a device from "something I own" into "something that's truly got my back." Those two small routines are what stand between you and the drawer-dwelling pendant that failed someone when it mattered. Make them automatic, and you can relax.

PART 7

Living With It — Cheat-Sheet & When to Call Bill

Fitting the device into everyday life, a one-page reminder to keep handy, and an honest word about when a call to me is the right move. You've got this.

CHAPTER 21

Common Questions, Answered

Over the years, the same honest questions come up again and again. Here are plain answers to the ones I hear most, so you're not left wondering.

"Will Medicare pay for it?"

Generally, **traditional Medicare does not cover** medical alert systems. However, some **Medicare Advantage** plans and some long-term-care insurance policies include or discount them, and some local senior agencies help with cost. Always check the current details directly with your own plan or agency — the specifics change, and I don't want you relying on a general answer where your own money is concerned.

"What if I don't have a home phone anymore?"

No problem at all. Choose a **cellular** system (in-home or mobile), which uses the same kind of signal a cell phone uses and needs no landline. Just confirm the company's cellular coverage is good at your address before you commit.

"Can I wear it in the shower?"

Only if it's rated **waterproof** for that — and many good pendants are, which matters because so many falls happen in the bathroom. "Water-resistant" (splash-proof) is not the same as shower-safe, so ask specifically. If yours is waterproof, wear it in the shower; it's one of the most important places to have it on.

"What happens if the power or internet goes out?"

A good in-home base unit has a **backup battery** that keeps it working for hours during a power cut, and cellular systems don't depend on your home internet at all. Ask each company how long their backup lasts. Mobile units run on their own battery, so a home outage doesn't affect them.

"I'm worried I'll press it by accident all the time."

It happens occasionally to everyone, and it's genuinely no trouble — you just tell the agent you're fine. Buttons are designed to need a deliberate press, so accidental ones are less common than people fear. And remember the rule: a false alarm is always, always better than a real fall with no call.

"Is my information private?"

Reputable companies keep your health and contact details confidential and use them only to help you in an emergency. It's a fair question to ask any company directly: who sees my information, and how is it protected? A trustworthy provider will answer plainly.

GOOD TO KNOW

Didn't see your question here?

These are just the common ones. If something specific is on your mind — about your health situation, your home, or a particular device — that's a perfect thing to ask the company, your doctor, or me. There are no silly questions when it comes to your safety.

CHAPTER 22

Everyday Life and Family Peace of Mind

Once your device is set up, worn, and tested, it should fade into the background of your life — present but unobtrusive, like a smoke detector you're glad is there and rarely think about. A few closing thoughts help it sit comfortably in your days and your family's.

It's allowed to be just-in-case

Most people who wear a medical alert go months or years without ever pressing it in a real emergency — and that's a wonderful outcome, not wasted money. You don't buy fire insurance hoping for a fire. The value is in the **protection and the peace of mind**, every single day, whether or not you ever need the button.

Bringing family into it — gently

A medical alert often eases a quiet strain between generations. The adult child who worries can worry less; the parent who feels watched can feel trusted to stay independent instead. If family are pushing a device and you're resisting, it may help to hear it as what it usually is: love, and a wish to keep you home and well for as long as possible.

GOOD TO KNOW

Caregiver features, used with consent

Many systems let a family member — only with your say-so — see that your device is charged and working, or get a message if you call for help. Shared this way, it's a comfort to everyone and a loss of independence to no one. You decide what to share and can change it anytime.

Keep it current as life changes

Revisit your setup when things change: a new medication for your Medical ID, a new phone number for a contact, a move to a new home, a change in how active you are. A five-minute update keeps your safety net matched to your real life. A good time to check is the same monthly moment you test the device.

A word of reassurance

If carrying a medical alert ever makes you feel older or more fragile, I'd gently push back on that feeling. The people I've helped set these up almost always say the same thing afterward: they feel **freer**, not frailer — more willing to take the walk, stay in their home, live

their life — because the safety net lets them. That's the whole point, and it's a good one.

CHAPTER 23

The Everyday Cheat-Sheet

Tear this out or photograph it, and keep it where you'll see it. It's the heart of the whole book on one page.

If something's wrong — what to do

Situation	What to do
Can reach a phone, real emergency	Call **911**. Always right when you can dial.
Can't reach a phone / have fallen	**Press your medical alert button.** Talk to the agent; they send help.
Pressed it by mistake	Just say "I'm fine, pressed it by accident." No trouble at all.
On an Apple Watch	Hold the side button to start Emergency SOS; it calls 911 and your contacts.

The golden rules

- **Wear it always** — shower, bedside, house, yard. A device in a drawer helps no one.
- **Test it monthly** — press it, say "this is a test," confirm it works and your info is current.
- **Keep it charged** — tie charging to a daily habit; never ignore a low-battery beep.
- **When in doubt, press it** — a false alarm is always better than a missed emergency.
- **It doesn't replace 911** — if you can reach a phone in a real emergency, call 911.

Before you buy — the short checklist

- Monitored or not? Monthly cost with everything included? Any contract or cancellation fee?
- Does it cover where I actually go — home, out, garden, shower?
- Will I genuinely **wear** this style every day?
- Is there a risk-free trial? Did I read the fine print (or have Bill read it)?

STAY SAFE

The scam rule

Never give bank or payment details to someone who called *you* about a medical alert, and never trust a "free device a relative ordered" robocall. Real companies let you research and decide. When unsure, hang up and call Bill.

CHAPTER 24

When to Call Bill

This book will carry you a long way, and I hope it's taken the fear and confusion out of a worthwhile decision. But you are never on your own with this — that's simply not how I do things. Here's an honest word about when to pick up the phone, so you never feel you're imposing.

Good reasons to call — none of them silly

- You're **comparing systems** and want an honest, no-sales second opinion — I don't sell these, so my only interest is what's right for you.
- You've got a plan in front of you and want someone to **read the fine print** before you sign — contracts, fees, cancellation terms.
- Your device **arrived** and you'd like a hand setting it up, testing it, and confirming your information is right.
- You want to turn on and practice your iPhone or Apple Watch **safety features** — Medical ID, Emergency SOS, fall detection.
- You got a **pushy call or suspicious offer** about a medical alert and want to check if it's legitimate before doing anything.

How to reach me

I'm Bill, and I run **Bill's Home Tech** right here in Portage County, Ohio. I've spent 30+ years helping people feel at ease and safe with their technology, and helping folks protect their independence is some of the most meaningful work I do.

Phone	(330) 200-8042 — call or text. If I can't pick up, leave a message and I'll call you back.
Book a visit online	billshometech.com/book
Where I work	Portage County, Ohio, and the nearby communities.
If you visit the website	You may chat with Sophie, my friendly assistant on the site, who can help you book a time to talk.

FROM BILL

My standing offer

If anything about choosing, setting up, or living with a medical alert ever puzzles or worries you, pick up the phone. No question is too small and no concern too silly. I'll help you weigh the options, read the fine print, set it up, and test it — plainly and patiently, with no sales pitch, because I don't sell these. Helping folks stay safe and independent in their own homes is the best part of this job.

— Bill · Bill's Home Tech · (330) 200-8042 · BillsHomeTech.com

A few parting words

Here's the truth to carry away from all these pages: choosing to protect yourself is an act of strength and foresight, not weakness. The folks I help are capable, independent people who simply want to *stay* that way — and a good medical alert is one of the surest tools for it.

Don't let the advertising or the fine print overwhelm you. Take it one calm step at a time: decide what fits your life, ask the honest questions, wear it, test it monthly. Do that, and you've given yourself and the people who love you a genuine, lasting gift — the freedom to keep living your life, with help only a button away. **You're going to do just fine.**

— Bill