

Many seniors want to live at home where they're most comfortable. At the same time, they may worry about being home alone after surgery, falling or suffering a sudden attack that leaves them unable to call for help. Below, Susan Gauthier, answers some frequently asked questions from seniors who are considering installing a personal emergency response system in their home, as they look for tools that will help them to continue to live independently.

QUESTION: *I enjoy the independence I have living alone but sometimes worry how I would get help if I couldn't reach the phone. Recently some friends have gotten emergency response systems. Can you tell me more about them?*

ANSWER: A Personal Emergency Response System (PERS) is an electronic device designed to let you summon help in an emergency. A PERS has three components: a small radio transmitter (a help button carried or worn by the user); a console connected to the user's telephone; and an emergency response center that monitors calls.

When emergency help is needed, the user presses the transmitter's help button. It sends a radio signal to the console. Most PERS are programmed to send a signal to a response center where the caller is identified. Within seconds a response team will determine the nature of the emergency and summon the help you need. If the center cannot contact you or determine whether an emergency exists, it will alert emergency service providers to go to your home. With most systems, the center will monitor the situation until the crisis is resolved.

The help buttons are waterproof so that they can be worn in the shower and lightweight so that they are comfortable to wear. They can easily be worn as a necklace or as a wristband. Most PERS have a battery backup system so that you are protected even if there is no power.

QUESTION: *What should I consider when thinking about whether a personal emergency response system is right for me ?*

ANSWER: It is important that you consult your physician and your family and friends as you consider whether or not you should continue to live independently. Once your physician, friends and family have discussed your individual circumstances with you, there are important things to consider when deciding if a personal emergency response system will give you the peace of mind you're looking for.

You will want to know whether the monitoring center available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, what is the average response time, how is the unit tested to assure it is properly functioning, is the unit easy to operate and whether you can use the system if you move. Together with the input from your doctor and those you love, you can make a decision that is right for you.

For more information on this or any other health topic please contact Susan Gauthier, Community Care Physicians' Wellness Concierge (783-3110 extension 3347) at the Capital Region Health Park in Latham. Community Care Physicians Wellness Concierge

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