

Guide to  
**HEALTHY ACTIVE AGEING**

# Choosing the right protection for your needs

Part 2 of the Healthy Active Ageing series by Actichcek

[info@actichcek.com](mailto:info@actichcek.com)  
0345 25 75 080  
[www.actichcek.com](http://www.actichcek.com)



# Choosing the right protection for your needs

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## What is a personal alarm system?

- A personal alarm system lets people know you need help.
- With most systems you can manually activate the alarm and some have additional automatic triggers.
- Consider where you want the protection. Some systems are best away from home however most are designed for use in the home where many accidents go undiscovered.
- In this guide we will explore the systems available and who might benefit from them, to ensure you make a good choice for your needs.

## Why consider a system?

- An effective alerting system is like having insurance, though it cannot stop bad things happening it makes sure that when they do happen the impact will be minimised.
- An effective personal alarm will ensure you quickly get help when you need it. It also means that any dependents or pets can be helped too.
- Often it's a delayed response, rather than an event itself, that causes the greatest problem.

## Who should consider an alert system?

- Anyone who spends 'significant time' alone should consider getting a system. 'Significant time' can be assessed by considering the risk of something bad happening along with the impact of going undiscovered for a period of time.

## Good candidates for a system:

### Solo Seniors

As people age they become more at risk of accidents in the home. Old people are also far more affected by cold and by lying in the same position for too long.

### People with long term conditions

For some conditions which keep people at home alone, a significant amount of time can elapse between an event and a partner returning from work.

### Carer relationships

Carers often feel that leaving the person they care for, even for just 5 minutes, can be a significant amount of time. A suitable alarm system could give them the freedom to resume some normal activities and take action only if an alarm is raised.

It is doubly important for carers to have their own alarms. It is often assumed that the person being cared for is the 'at risk' person but if anything should happen to the carer it is the welfare of both that is at risk.

### People who lose track of where they are

Some people with dementia can wander and lose track of where they are. They can be lost and alone for a significant time during which they can be vulnerable, agitated and potentially exposed to the elements.

**The following information demonstrates why you should protect those you care about.**

**There are over ¼ million hospitalisations from falls by over 65s each year.**

The BMJ highlights the importance of timely intervention, saying "... the attendant risks of any fall are far greater because of the complications that can ensue from lying on the floor for a long time - for example, pressure sores (often exacerbated by unavoidable incontinence), carpet burns, dehydration, hypothermia, pneumonia, and even death".

**There are 31,800 excess winter deaths in the UK each year through being cold at home.**

## Being clear about your needs

It is easy to get excited by the way products are presented but you should focus on what a system will do for you and whether it will meet your needs.

Consider the following questions and decide which are essential or desirable to you:

Feature	Essential	Desirable
<b>SOS Alarm</b> Makes it easy for the subject to call at the moment of need Might not be of use to people with mid stage dementia		
<b>Fall Monitor</b> Can raise an alarm if a severe fall is detected		
<b>Unresponsive</b> Ability to check if subject is unresponsive at times throughout the day		
<b>Cold at home</b> Ability to check the temperature of the subject's home		
<b>Gating</b> Ability for an alarm to be raised when someone leaves their home		
<b>Coverage:</b> <b>In home only</b> Suits those with no garden or outside space		
<b>Home &amp; Garden</b> Works wherever someone is. Accidents in the garden come with additional issues such as exposure to sun or inclement weather		
<b>Out &amp; About</b> Your risk when out is typically lower than when at home because passers by will often offer timely aid		
<b>Fit &amp; forget: Designed to work 24/7</b> No day-to-day management or charging so it is always active <i>(70% of falls happen overnight)</i>		
<b>Alarm calls go to:</b> <b>Family, friends &amp; neighbours</b>		
<b>Monitoring centre</b>		
<b>Online dashboard</b> For self-management and remote monitoring for family and friends		
<b>Set-up:</b> <b>At home by user</b> Simple online set-up by user or family member		
<b>By specialist installer</b> Make an appointment for installer to fit		

## Product type overview

Exploring the different approaches to alarms.

Feature	The Assure (Acticheck)	Pendant Alarm	Home Monitoring (Canary Care)	Once a day check	Phones, smartphone apps and smart watch	GPS Tracker (eg Pebbell)
SOS Alarm	✓	✓			Can be difficult to operate	✓
Fall Monitor	✓		✓			
Unresponsive	✓	Optional extra	✓	✓		
Cold at home	✓		✓			
Gating			✓			✓
Coverage: In home only			✓	✓		
Home & Garden	✓	✓				Notional but not practical
Out & About (iPhone app)					Only where signal	✓
Fit & forget: Designed to work 24/7	✓ 1 Year Battery		✓			
Alarm calls go to: Family, friends & neighbours	✓		✓		Depends on choice	✓
Monitoring centre	Optional extra	✓	Optional extra	✓		
Online dashboard	✓		✓			✓
Set-up: At home by user	✓			✓		✓
By specialist installer		✓	✓			
Costs: Year 1 Year 2 onwards	£199.99 £74.99	£195.80 £150.80	£441.00 £192.00	£167.50 £132.50	Depends on choice	£199.00 £60.00

## Product type descriptions

Exploring the different approaches to alarms.

### The Assure, from Acticheck

We developed the Assure because we were aware of the limitations of existing systems for people to call for help throughout home and garden, where most unnoticed incidents occur. A stylish wristband that can be worn for a year without removing means help is always at hand. We also realised there are various reasons that help may be needed, and we designed alert triggers to cover a wide range of situations.

#### Strengths

- **Ease of use**, you 'fit & forget' so it is there when needed.
- **SOS buttons** for wearer to call for help.
- **Fall monitor** included on wristband.
- **Wellness check-ins** to ensure people are responsive during the day; unique to Acticheck, you choose times for the band to buzz and the wearer presses a button to confirm they are OK.
- **Cold at home alerts.**
- **Link direct to family & friends**, with an optional fall-back to monitoring centre.
- **Home & Garden cover.**
- **Online dashboard** to track activity.

#### Weaknesses

- **Limited functionality** away from the home.
- It requires some simple interaction that could be beyond mid to late stage dementia sufferers.

#### Suitable for

- Anyone who is capable of simple interaction and whose home & garden is where they are most at risk of an incident going unnoticed.

# The Community/Pendant alarm

The Community/Pendant alarm was the first telecare solution and was a huge step forward when it was introduced in the early 1980's. It remains the standard issue equipment but, arguably, should have been retired long ago.

### Strengths

- Widely available through social services.
- Home & Garden cover.

### Weaknesses

- Works only in limited circumstances when the user is wearing it and capable of pressing the button.
- Impractical for overnight wear (70% of falls are overnight).
- Studies indicate often worn only for show when concerned relatives are visiting and there is no way of knowing if it is being worn at other times.
- Normally installed by specialist.
- False alarm because of accidental pressure on single, prominent, button.

### Suitable for

- It is difficult to find a scenario in which to recommend a traditional pendant alarm system.

# Home Monitoring systems

The Internet revolution has brought about a family of systems which monitor the environment in which a person lives to draw inferences about their life.

### Strengths

- The best products for assessing someone's behaviour in the home as machine learning picks up regular patterns and can detect variances from this to raise alarms.
- Does not require conscious interaction of client.

### Weaknesses

- Has difficulty in adapting to people who do not keep to regular patterns.
- Works in home only (i.e. not in the garden)
- Can take several hours to raise the alarm as it needs to be sure that a pattern has been broken.
- Relatively expensive and difficult to install.

### Suitable for

- Housebound people with regular behaviour who are unable to interact with new equipment, such as mid to late stage dementia sufferers.

## Phones (and apps), watches and gadgets

Phones are ideal if they are to hand and the person is capable of using them. However, phones tend to be positioned where they are charged (at least overnight) so proximity is a major issue. Even if the phone is with the person there are many emergency situations where it may not be practical to use them, such as extreme pain, or after a fall. Fitness trackers can be very effective at tracking fitness and some vital signs but do not raise an alarm in a time of need. Some apps and smartwatches have all sorts of interesting functions but for the same reasons should not be relied on as emergency devices.

### Strengths

- Technology can look great and be fun to play with.

### Weaknesses

- Proximity when in the home – in an overnight visit to the toilet both the phone and smartwatch would likely be on charge.
- Connectivity when out – You may not have network coverage when you need to raise an alarm.
- Ease of activation - In an emergency will you have it to hand and remember how to use it.
- Limited functions.

### Suitable for

- Events where the person will be able to get to and operate their phone.

## GPS tracker

These are specialist devices designed to work on any cellular network and so have a good chance of 'being heard' when raising an alarm. Devices are active and so need charging and some management (i.e. you have to remember to take it with you and have it immediately to hand when needed).

### Strengths

- Connectivity when out and about.
- Can generally track to see where someone is at any given time (a bit like a 'find-my-phone' app).

### Weaknesses

- Proximity when in the home – it is likely to be on charge and not in reach when needed.
- Limited functions.

### Suitable for

- Mentally competent people who like to walk alone in the countryside and may have a health risk.
- Those who like their independence but whose faculties are failing, provided there is someone there to make sure it is charged and they have the device with them.

# Once a day checks

These could be phone calls that you make as a family or are made by a professional. There are some automated systems that allow the client to confirm with a button press that they are OK by mid-morning otherwise they receive a call.

### Strengths

- Once a day you know if the person is at home and responsive.
- Can be organised without any additional equipment.
- Can be done informally, amongst family & friends.

### Weaknesses

- If someone is out, for whatever reason, the system does not know and acts as if an unresponsive emergency.
- An emergency occurring after a check call will only be alerted when the following day's call is not acknowledged.

### Suitable for

- People who have no particular need and are resistant to wearing technology or having it in their home.