



## For About and By Caregivers

### Why PERS Makes Sense

By Sandra Fuson, Staff Writer

Constance reached out for help to a local community service organization when she fell from her bed. Weighing a little over 200 pounds, Constance was unable to get up on her own and needed someone to help her get up. Firemen had been to her home earlier in the week, and would help her once again on this particular day. Yet Constance could not continue to rely on the fire department for help. The first time the fire department arrived, they broke through a door to get into the home, and now Constance faced a costly repair to make her home safe again.

"I used to have a home provider, but I couldn't afford it anymore," she stated. "If I had someone to help me with a few things around the house, maybe I wouldn't have to ask for help for things like this. It's embarrassing."

Individuals who are 65 or older face frightening statistics – falls are the leading cause of death according to the National Center for Health Statistics. There are many alternative devices that can be used today. Some can be worn on the body and others can be placed strategically throughout the home. The key factor is finding a way to keep the elderly and disabled safe in their homes in order to prevent a terrifying event.

Individuals like Constance who do not have someone in the home to help him or her or do not have a close support network may need the help that a personal emergency response system (PERS) can provide. PERS can be used to summon help in the event of a fall, even calling emergency workers if needed. Plus, the additional repair work Constance faced would not be needed if someone knew how to gain access to the house or knew that Constance had left a key with the neighbor across the street.

#### What is PERS?

A simple PERS device can be placed on a tabletop or worn to allow your loved one increased independence. A single push of a button can let attendants at the PERS monitoring station know that help is needed. Phones are not usually necessary. There are more sophisticated systems, of course, that allow increased home monitoring, such as whether or not someone has wandered from home or if they have fallen in an upstairs bedroom. There are even PERS devices that allow a monitoring station to determine if someone took their medicine at a particular time.

Convincing someone to use a PERS device may be a challenge in the beginning until they are accustomed to the idea and accept it as part of their daily routine. There are some individuals who do not see the benefit of PERS or feel that the expense cannot be justified. For those individuals, there are several tactics that you can try to get them to understand why PERS can be beneficial to them.

#### It's the Smart Choice:

In 2005, researchers reported in *Nursing Economics* that the median hospital cost at more than \$9,300 for an elderly person who suffered injuries in a fall. This cost can soar if injuries are exacerbated by the person's inability to get help immediately after the fall has taken place. In addition, the total cost of a fall could exceed \$19,000, according to the National Center for Injury Prevention, once the costs of home health care and physical therapy are considered. Finally, the risk of early death is increased with one major fall episode.

Logically speaking, the cost of a PERS could easily be offset by the cost of one hospitalization for a broken hip or other serious injury from a fall. In addition, if your loved one is alone most of the day, they may appreciate the comfort of knowing someone can contact a loved one in the event that they are not able to use the phone or cannot remember a phone number.

#### It's the Safe Choice:

As the number of individuals who are aging and choosing to remain in their homes (also known as aging in place) increases, the likelihood of needing assistance at some point also increases. According to the 2001 American Housing Survey, more than 21.8 million households have someone who is at least 65 years of age or older. In addition, 46% of those households are made up of individuals who live alone. Many of these houses are aging or are multi-story buildings, including apartment complexes.

While it is a salute to America's health care system that aging individuals are able to live in their homes for longer, the question of being safe is also an issue. Long distance caregivers especially worry what will happen to their loved ones should an accident in the household occur. With a PERS in place, this anxiety is lessened, allowing more freedom of mobility and worry-free days.

#### **For Those with Dementia:**

Recognizing that not all individuals are able to make the choice for themselves, the Alzheimer's Association has developed a list of recommendations for how to convince someone to wear a Safe Return ID that can be easily customized to PERS devices. Many of today's PERS devices will signal if someone has wandered too far from home or if they have fallen, without pushing any buttons or otherwise interacting with the device. Many of these devices can be worn as necklaces or bracelets and are unobtrusive on a daily basis. Try these suggestions:

#### **Give the device as a gift.**

Introduce it at several different points of the day until your loved one establishes a comfort level with it.

Wear something similar yourself.

Ask your doctor to give it to them. Sometimes a person in authority may have better luck convincing them than you.

See if it's possible to attach the device to a piece of clothing or the lining of a sweater they wear every day.

The technology available today makes almost any type of PERS device readily available in the home. Finding a way to convince your loved one can be challenging at times. If your loved one has a chronic illness or lives without immediate support, a PERS system is an investment that is well worth the money. The peace of mind and security that come from knowing help is only a few minutes away is invaluable.

Constance would agree. She called and had a PERS system installed so that the next time she needed assistance, the monitoring station would call the next door neighbor with the key to her house to help her instead of the local fire department. This decision proved easier and much more cost-effective. She no longer felt embarrassed asking for help and knew that if she needed help, she only needed to push a button and help would be available within moments.

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