

Emergency Response Redefined



A note from our CEO:

Since our company's inception in the emergency response space, we've always had one goal: to help our customers stay safe out there.

But we also look to our customers to define what "out there" is for them. For an avid hiker, "out there" might be a rocky ledge outcropping in one of our national parks. A person with congestive heart failure (CHF) might define "out there" as being able to monitor their own vital signs from the comfort of their living room – outside the hospital walls. An octogenarian might define "out there" as traveling to her grandson's wedding, across the country.

To keep you safe out there, we created products that are 1) easy to use and 2) the most reliable in the industry, to ensure you can always get help if you need it.

And all our products meet that criteria: When a user presses the "Help" button on one of our devices, trained operators receive the call and know who the user is, where they are, and can contact them to determine the scope of the emergency and provide the right level of response.

So, go live your best life: in whatever way you define "out there," we'll be there with you.

Best regards,



Rob Flippo
CEO, MobileHelp

This Guide Includes

- Straight Talk: Innovation in Falls and Fall Prevention
- Create an Age-in-Place Space
- Fall Prevention Health: A Marathon, Not a Sprint
- Assessing Emergency Response Devices

Straight Talk: Falls and Fall Prevention

An interview with Rob Flippo, CEO of MobileHelp, about technology innovation to address falls and fall prevention.

Q: What are some of the advances in technology for fall prevention you are seeing in the marketplace?

A: When you're talking about fall prevention, there are two aspects for consideration: the first (and in my mind most important) is **risk assessment**.

Understanding if you are at risk for falling allows you to devise a strategy around preventing that type of an emergency. And risk assessment can be as simple as looking at lifestyle and medical factors, with an understanding of the primary issues that cause falls. For example, we know one reason people fall is due to medication errors. If you have a series of medications you manage, that should factor into your personal risk assessment.

The second aspect of fall prevention is mitigating that known risk by **incorporating devices designed for safety**. Anyone identified as a person who is high-risk can incorporate aspects of safety into their living spaces. I mentioned earlier that medication error accounts for a large portion of falls: there are now high-tech solutions that help people manage their medications – from “smart” pill bottles to PERS systems that incorporate medication reminders. On the low-tech side, grab bars, hand rails, and step stools can be installed to incorporate safety elements into the home.

Q: How can these innovations help after a fall has occurred?

A: If a person has had a fall, the risk of a subsequent fall is 50 percent more likely in the next six months. In this case, incorporating the components we discussed above – from risk assessment to implementation of safety support – is critical to rebuilding strength.

If a person has a fall, getting help in the first hour increases survival rates by 6 times. Having an emergency response device or support systems in place can mean the difference between a quick trip to the ER versus several days in the hospital.



Rob Flippo
CEO, MobileHelp

Q: Why is it important to prevent falls before they happen?

A: Falls are the number one cause of injury and death among older adults, and the cost of treating and managing falls represents one of the largest costs to the healthcare system, as well as to patients and families.

For this reason, the healthcare and technology industries have come together over the past decade to look at fall prevention in the way I previously described: assess risk and design solutions to address the risk.

Q: What role do certain medications play in falls? How can medication reminders assist in preventing falls?

A: As I've mentioned, medication errors account for about 60 percent of all fall emergencies – either due to missing a dose or doubling up on one. Medication reminders can help people manage their medications, and anyone who has been on a medication knows how complex it can be to manage just one or two. Managing five or six only exacerbates the issue exponentially.

Our medication reminder program allows people to add medications to their personal account online and set times to have their medical alert system remind them to take their meds.

Q: Is the attitude shifting around fall prevention and fall prevention devices?

A: At the professional level, the healthcare providers and hospitals we work with are deeply aware of the importance related to fall prevention and are starting to implement fall management programs on a system-wide scale.

At the consumer level, patients at home may or may not be willing to admit to they have had a fall out of embarrassment or fear around loss of independence. This is where I feel the technology industry can really step in to help – there are solutions on the marketplace now that are tablet-based (which the grandkids will envy when they see them) as well as tech-savvy devices (such as smartwatches and other smart wearables) that not only address the stigma attached to emergency response devices, but allow patients to track other aspects of their lives, from activity levels to heart rate to sleep.

Ultimately, the combined drive from both the technology and healthcare industries will provide a more comprehensive solution for patients and their providers to address fall prevention.

Creating a Safe Home Environment

Below we've assembled a few tips to help people who are moving an aging parent or loved one into their home or helping them age in place in their own home.

Consider hiring a specialist: An occupational therapist, physical therapist, geriatric care manager or other [certified aging-in-place specialist](#) can provide a home assessment to recommend modifications that will make it safer. You can also check out the Department of Veterans Affairs tip sheets on [modifications for a specific diagnosis](#).

Look to universal design: Incorporating elements that are stylish, comfortable and safe for all ages is a great way to create an environment that works well for anyone. These can include such things as:

- Zero-threshold entryways.
- Offset door hinges to make room for a wheelchair, walker or two people walking side by side.
- Controls and switches that are reachable from a wheelchair or bed.
- A waterproof seat in the shower.
- Textured no-slip strips in slippery areas, such as the bathtub/shower.
- Switch out standard doorknobs for lever handles.
- Move laundry facilities to the first floor.



Check for Tripping Hazards: Every year, one in three adults over the age 65 experiences a fall. To mitigate the risk:

- Remove small throw rugs and repair loose carpeting.
- Use rubber-backed bathmats.
- Put nonskid treads on steps.
- Keep steps clear.
- Apply nonslip wax to floors.
- Move small (and low) furniture.
- Clear electric cords and clutter.
- Add a hall railing.



Light it Up: As we age, we need more light. You can look to install:

- Bright lights in hallways, closets and stairwells.
- Extra lamps — consider models that turn on and off with a touch.
- Outdoor motion sensor lights and path lights.

Stay Connected: If you are home alone, you can stay in touch regularly with a video-chat app, smart speaker system or messaging platform.

Fall Prevention Health: A Marathon, Not a Sprint

According to the *National Safety Council*, falls are not inherently a natural part of aging. The Council recommends specific exercises from the *National Institutes of Health (NIH)* to [strengthen leg musculature and enhance balance](#) for lifelong health, as well as the following:

Exercising to improve your balance:

- **Try a balance stand:** Stand on one foot while brushing your teeth and hold your weight on one leg for 30 seconds or longer. Then switch sides.
- **Toe the line:** Walk heel-to-toe by positioning your heel in front of the toes on your opposite foot each time you take a step along an imaginary line.
- **Sit and stand:** Get up from a chair and then sit back down. Repeat.
- **Go to the gym:** Ask a trainer to teach you exercises using balance balls or boards. Or join a yoga, tai chi, Pilates or dance class.
- **Try strength training:** Using weights or resistance bands can improve balance while also improving muscle tone and bone strength.



Taking preventive measures

- **Talk to your doctor** and pharmacist about your medications and their potential side effects, including dizziness.
- Have your vision, eyeglasses and hearing checked annually.
- **Take your time** getting out of bed. Sit up for a moment or two to ensure that you are not too dizzy to stand and walk.
- **Be cautious** when wearing high-heeled or new shoes, especially when walking in unfamiliar areas.
- The bathroom can be **a prime place for falls**: Consider installing a grab bar on the wall of your bath or shower to help with balance.
- When outdoors, **watch for invisible ice**. Ensure that sidewalks, driveways and streets where you park are salted in bad weather.



Assessing Emergency Response Devices

The Senior List, an online resource guide for seniors, has done extensive research on medical alert systems, and recommends using the following as a [guide for evaluation](#):

Buying Medical Alert Systems: Common Mistakes

There are **six common mistakes** that are made when purchasing a medical alert system:

1. Choosing the wrong type of medical alert system for your needs.

Medical alert systems can be home-based or cellular. Do you prefer a pendant or a watch? Some pendants have a speakerphone, is this important to you? Many falls happen in the bathroom, is the device water resistant?

2. Locked into a long-term contract.

What happens if you don't need it anymore? How long are you obligated to pay the monthly monitoring fee? Is there a return and refund policy? Who pays for return shipping?

3. Not enough coverage for the size of your home.

In-home units have a range anywhere from a 400-1500 square feet radius. Walls can impact this range. If you plan to travel outside your home, does your system have a cellular option?

4. Waiting too long to start using a medical alert system.

Do your research before an emergency arises. Signs such as unsteady gait, weakness, living alone and a history of falls are all indicators that safety is at risk. Medical alert systems can help people live at home longer because they provide an additional layer of safety and communication if help is needed.

5. Getting a system that is difficult to install.

Who installs the system? Does a representative visit your home? What support is available if you install it yourself? Is special equipment needed?

6. Hidden fees.

It can be difficult to weed out hidden fees at first glance. Make sure you read the fine print and contract, understand if there are fees for the equipment, or if you will have to pay a penalty if you cancel the service.

General Features of a Modern Medical Alert

These are the different types of medical alert devices and the features available in today's systems:

- **In-Home Medical Alerts:** There are two main types of medical alert systems on the market today: In-Home and Cellular. In-Home medical alert systems generally require a landline phone connection in the home, and are best for those who spend the majority of their time in or around the home in order to stay within the base station range of 400-1500 sq/ft.
- **Cellular Medical Alerts:** Cellular medical alert systems are able to provide coverage anywhere a typical cell phone would work (depending on cell carrier). Cellular alert devices perform in a similar way to in-home systems by connecting the user to a call center once the button is pressed. Cellular systems are great for people who travel, are able to drive or are always on the go. Cellular devices can be worn discreetly around the neck, on a belt clip or placed in a pocket or purse.
- **Automatic Fall Detection:** This is a newer feature on medical alert systems. Ideally, the device automatically activates and places a call to the call center if a fall is detected without the user having to press the button.
- **GPS Enabled:** This feature helps the call center professionals to determine the user's location even if the user themselves does not know (or can't remember) where they are. GPS technology is extremely accurate and can usually determine a user's position within a few meters.

Must-Have Features of a Medical Alert Device

Regardless of what type of medical alert system you choose, we believe there are a few non-negotiable features that every device should have:

- **Water Resistant:** Since 80% of falls occur in the bathroom, and it only makes sense to wear an alert device in the shower, we must insist that it is water resistant or better yet, waterproof.
- **Comfortable and Lightweight:** One of the worst things that could happen after investing in life-saving technology like a medical alert system is that you don't want to wear it.
- **Long Battery Life:** Like comfort, if a device needs to be charged daily, chances are it won't get worn. Some cellular devices can only last for a few days on a single charge, the longest we have seen is one month.
- **Adequate Range:** A medical alert system is useless if the transmitter is not strong enough to make contact with the base station from all areas of the living space — both inside and outside. Be sure to check the range of the device shortly after installation to ensure it will provide coverage throughout the living area.
- **Money Back Guarantee:** The best providers today will offer a 15-30 day return policy if you are not satisfied with the product. From there, you are most likely on a month-to-month plan (quarterly and annual may be offered as well) that won't be refunded if you cancel mid-term.