GPS Medical Alarms vs. Phone-Based Location Sharing for Seniors in Remuera

For older adults who live independently in Remuera and across Auckland, staying safe while out and about is a growing concern. Families want peace of mind without turning their loved one's life into a surveillance operation. Two approaches have become common: a dedicated GPS medical alarm device, and using a smartphone's location-sharing features. Each has its strengths and its trade-offs, and the right choice depends on the person's habits, technology comfort, and the kind of support they need.

How a GPS Medical Alarm Works

A GPS medical alarm is a small wearable device that includes a cellular connection and a GPS receiver. When the wearer presses an SOS button, the alarm sends their current location to a pre-set list of contacts, often family members or neighbours. Many devices also include automatic fall detection, which triggers an alert if a sudden impact or immobility is sensed, even if the person cannot press the button themselves.

These alarms are designed to be simple. There is no app to open, no screen to navigate, and no need to remember to charge a phone or carry it. The device itself handles the communication over a mobile network, and the wearer only needs to press one button in an emergency. Some models allow two-way voice calling, so the responder can speak to the wearer through the device to assess the situation.

Phone-Based Location Sharing

Modern smartphones have built-in location-sharing features. Services like Google's Location Sharing, Apple's Find My, and various third-party apps allow a person to share their real-time GPS location with chosen contacts. The phone uses its own GPS and cellular data to send position updates, and the contact can see the person's location on a map from their own device.

View the location on Google Maps

The appeal of phone-based sharing is that it uses a device many people already carry. There is no extra gadget to buy, wear, or remember to bring along. For someone who is already comfortable with a smartphone, setting up location sharing takes just a few taps in the settings. It can also provide a more detailed view of the person's movements, showing where they have been and how long they stayed in one place.

Key Differences to Weigh

The most important difference is the nature of the alert. A GPS medical alarm sends an SOS when the wearer actively asks for help or when a fall is detected. Phone-based location sharing, by contrast, simply makes the person's location visible to chosen contacts. It does not send an alert when something is wrong. If a family member sees that the person has not moved for a while, they might wonder if something is amiss, but the phone itself will not call for help.



Another difference is reliability in an emergency. A phone's battery can run out, the device can be left behind, or the person might be unable to navigate the phone's interface when stressed or injured. A dedicated alarm is built for exactly that scenario: it has a long battery life, is usually water-resistant, and is designed to be worn at all times. Many models also have a range that works away from home, as long as there is mobile coverage.

Privacy is a factor too. Phone-based location sharing can feel intrusive if it runs continuously. The person being tracked may feel monitored, and the contact may receive more information than they need. A GPS alarm, on the other hand, only shares location when an alert is triggered, which respects the wearer's privacy day to day.

When Each Option Suits Best

Phone-based location sharing is a good fit for someone who is already comfortable with their smartphone, does not mind carrying it everywhere, and whose main need is for family to know their general whereabouts during the day. It works well for people who are active and independent but want an extra layer of visibility for peace of mind. It is also a low-cost option, since it uses existing equipment.

A GPS medical alarm is better for someone who may not always carry a phone, who has memory or dexterity challenges, or who is at higher risk of a fall or medical emergency. It is especially valuable for people who walk alone, travel by public transport, or spend time in areas with patchy mobile coverage, because the alarm can still send an SOS from almost anywhere on the mobile network. The automatic fall detection feature is something a phone cannot replicate reliably.

Familyr is also on LinkedIn.

For families in Remuera, where many older residents enjoy walking to local shops, parks, and community centres, a dedicated device can offer a stronger safety net. If a person falls while walking on a quiet street or in a park, a phone might not be able to call for help, but a GPS alarm can alert family members immediately.

Practical Considerations

When comparing the two, think about the wearer's daily routine. Do they always have their phone on them? Do they remember to charge it? Can they use the screen and touch controls under stress? If the answer to any of these is no, a dedicated alarm is likely the better choice.



Also consider who will respond. Phone-based sharing gives family members a live map view, but they have to actively check it. A GPS alarm sends a direct alert to up to ten nominated contacts, often in a programmed order until someone answers. Some devices can also be set to call emergency services directly if no one responds.

Battery life is another point. A smartphone may last a day or less with location sharing active, while a dedicated alarm can run for several days or weeks on a single charge, depending on usage and model.

For people who are less comfortable with technology, a dedicated device is far simpler. There is no setup beyond charging and pairing with the service, and no risk of accidentally turning off location sharing or silencing notifications.

How Familyr Fits Into the Picture

One option available in New Zealand is **Familyr**, a service that provides personal medical alarms with GPS location sharing, fall detection, and two-way calling. Their devices work both at home and away, as long as compatible mobile coverage is available. Alerts can be sent by SMS to up to ten nominated family members, friends, neighbours, or carers, and the alarm can be programmed to call 111 directly if needed. Familyr states that its alarms have no ongoing monitoring fee and include lifetime support.

For someone in Remuera who wants a dedicated device that does not rely on a smartphone, a service like this can fill the gap. The device can be worn with a lanyard, wristband, belt clip, armband, or keyring attachment, which makes it easy to keep on hand without changing daily habits.

Making a Decision

There is no single right answer. Phone-based location sharing is convenient and uses what you already have, but it lacks automatic emergency alerts and can be unreliable in a crisis. A GPS medical alarm is purpose-built for safety and simplicity, but it means carrying an extra device and remembering to keep it charged.



The best approach may be to combine both: use a smartphone for general location visibility during the day, and a dedicated alarm as a backup for emergencies. That way, the person has the benefits of both systems without relying entirely on one.

For families in Remuera and across Auckland, the choice comes down to the individual's lifestyle, health, and comfort with technology. Talking through these factors with the person and their doctor or occupational therapist can help make the right call.

Familyr is located at 14 Grand View Road, Remuera, Auckland 1050, New Zealand, and can be contacted on +64 9 872 0345.