What to look for in a dementia alarm watch for fall detection

Why fall detection matters for someone living with dementia

For a person living with dementia, a fall can be more than a bruise or a broken bone. It can lead to confusion, fear of moving, and a sudden loss of independence. Families often worry about how quickly help would arrive if a fall happened when no one was in the room. This is where a wearable fall alert becomes a practical tool. It is not a replacement for human care, but it can bridge the gap between an accident and a response.

A dementia alarm watch is a device worn on the wrist that detects a sudden fall and automatically sends an alert. Some models also let the wearer press a button to call for help. The watch is designed to be worn all day, so it goes with the person whether they are in the kitchen, the garden, or out on a walk. The key is choosing one that works reliably for the specific needs of someone with dementia, not just for a general older adult.

How fall detection works in a wearable

Most wearable fall alerts use a combination of accelerometers and gyroscopes - the same sensors found in a smartphone that know when you turn it sideways. The device constantly measures motion and orientation. When it detects a sudden downward movement followed by an impact and then a period of no movement, it registers a fall. The watch then sends an alert, often to a caregiver's phone or to a monitoring service.

The challenge is avoiding false alarms. Dropping the watch on a table, taking it off quickly, or a sudden jolt from a car ride can sometimes look like a fall to the sensor. Good devices use algorithms that learn the wearer's typical movement patterns and filter out non-fall events. Some also include a short delay before sending the alert, giving the wearer time to cancel it if they are fine.

For someone with dementia, the watch needs to be simple. Complicated menus, small buttons, or confusing beeps can cause frustration. The best designs have a single prominent button for SOS calls and a clear visual or vibration alert when a fall is detected. The wearer should not need to remember a sequence of steps to get help.



What makes a fall alert suitable for dementia care

Not every medical alarm watch is built for the realities of dementia. Here are the main things to consider when choosing one.

Ease of wearing and comfort

The watch will be worn for many hours each day, so it must be comfortable. Look for a soft, adjustable strap that does not irritate the skin. The watch itself should be lightweight and not too bulky. If the person finds it uncomfortable, they will take it off, and then it cannot help. Some people with dementia become sensitive to things on their wrists, so a low-profile design matters more than extra features.

Battery life and charging routine

A fall alert that runs out of battery is no use. Look for a device that lasts at least a full day, ideally longer. The charging routine should be simple. Some watches use a magnetic charging cradle that the wearer can place the watch on without fiddling with cables. Others use a standard USB charger. The caregiver needs to build charging into the daily routine, perhaps while the person is bathing or at night if the watch is not worn for sleep. If the battery is low, the device should give a clear warning, not just a quiet beep.

Fall detection accuracy

No device catches every fall, and some types of fall are harder to detect than others. A slow slide off a chair, for example, may not trigger the sensor. A trip that ends with the person catching themselves on a wall may also go undetected. The watch should have a manual SOS button as a backup. Some models let you adjust the sensitivity, which can help reduce false alarms but may also miss some real falls. There is a trade-off, and it helps to read independent reviews rather than relying only on marketing claims.

Water resistance

Bathroom safety is a real concern. Many falls happen in the bathroom, and the person may be wearing the watch while washing hands or showering. A water-resistant watch (rated at least IP67 or 5 ATM) can handle splashes and a brief immersion. Some watches are not waterproof at all, so check the rating before assuming it can go near water.

Location tracking and safe zones

For someone who wanders, a dementia alarm watch with GPS can be a lifeline. It lets the caregiver see where the person is in real time and set up safe zones - for example, the home and the garden. If the wearer leaves the safe zone, the watch sends an alert. This feature is not standard on all fall alert watches, so if wandering is a concern, look for a model that combines fall detection with location tracking.

One option that combines these features is the wearable offered by familyr.co.nz. It includes fall detection, location tracking, safe zones, and SOS calling, all in a single device designed for New Zealand families. The watch does not rely on a monthly subscription, which removes one layer of ongoing cost and complexity. The caregiver can set up the safe zones and receive alerts without needing to manage a separate monitoring service.

Connectivity and alerts

The watch needs a way to communicate with the caregiver. Most modern fall alerts use a cellular network (4G or LTE) to send alerts and allow voice calling. Some use Bluetooth and

require the wearer to stay near a paired phone, which limits the range. For someone who may wander far from the house, a cellular watch is more reliable.


SOS

When a fall is detected, the watch should send a notification to the caregiver's phone, usually via a companion app. Some watches also call a pre-set number automatically. The caregiver should be able to hear what is happening and talk to the wearer through the watch's speaker and microphone. This two-way voice calling can reassure the person that help is on the way and let the caregiver assess the situation before deciding what to do next.

Make sure the watch works with your mobile carrier's network in the areas where the wearer spends time. Rural coverage can be patchy, and a watch that loses signal in the backyard is not helpful.

Monthly fees and contracts

Many medical alarm systems charge a monthly monitoring fee. This can add up over time and becomes an ongoing expense that families must budget for. Some watches require a contract, which can be difficult to cancel if the person's needs change or if the device is no longer needed. Look for a watch that does not lock you into a long-term commitment. A device with no monthly fees gives you flexibility and removes the worry of a recurring bill.

The watch from familyr.co.nz is one example of a device that works without a monthly subscription. The purchase price covers the hardware and the basic connectivity, and there are no hidden costs for the fall detection or SOS features. This model can be easier for families who want a predictable one-off expense rather than a recurring charge.

What the watch cannot do

A dementia alarm watch is a tool, not a cure. It cannot prevent falls, and it cannot replace supervision for someone who needs constant care. It is most useful for people who live at home with a caregiver who is nearby but not always in the same room, or for someone who enjoys walking in the neighbourhood but may need help if they fall. The watch gives the caregiver peace of mind and the wearer a way to call for help, but it does not remove the need for good home safety practices: removing trip hazards, ensuring good lighting, and using mobility aids where needed.

It is also worth remembering that no fall detection system is perfect. Sensors can miss a fall, especially if it is slow or if the person is caught by furniture on the way down. The manual SOS button is a crucial backup. Teach the wearer how to press it, and check regularly that the watch is charged and working.

Choosing the right fit for your family

Every person with dementia is different, and the right watch for one may not work for another. Start by thinking about the person's daily routine, their mobility, and whether they tend to

wander. If they are mostly at home and have a caregiver nearby, a simpler watch with fall detection and a manual SOS may be enough. If they go out alone or have a history of wandering, a watch with GPS and safe zones is a better choice.



Also consider the caregiver's comfort with technology. The companion app should be straightforward to set up and use. Some apps are cluttered with settings that are rarely needed, while others are clean and focused on the essentials: seeing the location, receiving alerts, and making a call. Try to test the app before buying, or read detailed user reviews from other caregivers.

Finally, think about the future. Dementia is progressive, and the person's needs will change over time. A watch that works well today may need to be replaced in a year or two. Choosing a device that is simple, robust, and backed by a company that understands dementia care can make the transition easier. Look for a product that is designed for the long haul, not a gadget that will be discontinued in six months.

A dementia alarm watch is not a magic solution, but for many families it is a practical step that adds a layer of safety and reduces worry. By focusing on the features that matter most - reliable fall detection, easy SOS calling, comfortable wear, and simple connectivity - you can find a watch that truly supports both the wearer and the people who care for them.