

# Frequently Asked Questions

## Consumer Guidance

### About Emergency Medical Information and Identification Services

*We understand finding the right medical ID can be a difficult task. That's why we're here to help.*

Over 50 years ago our founder, Dr. Marion Collins, invented medical ID services. Since 1956, our mission has been to assist people in the event of a medical emergency by providing lifesaving medical ID products and comprehensive live 24/7 emergency information services. We are dedicated to ensuring your health, wellness, and safety, and hope the following *Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)* help you make an informed decision about the kinds of products and services best suited to you.

*If you don't find what you are looking for among our FAQs, please contact us online at [www.medicalert.org](http://www.medicalert.org) or call to speak to one of our highly trained staff. (See end of this document for a list of Customer Service phone numbers worldwide).*

### **What is a medical ID and what is an emergency medical information service?**

A **medical ID** can take a variety of forms, including bracelets, necklaces, dog tags, shoe tags, sports bands, or watches. A medical ID typically displays critical information about the wearer's medical conditions, allergies, medical devices, or medications.

MedicAlert Foundation's medical IDs are automatically supported by an **emergency medical information service** that first responders can communicate with in the event of an emergency to obtain more information about the medical ID wearer's medical conditions, medications, allergies, medical devices history, concerns, and preferences. If desired, the

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emergency medical information service may also notify the wearer's family or caregivers, provide access to medical registries, communicate Advance Directives/"Living Wills", and deliver GPS/location services if available.

### ***What are the different offerings of products and/or services out in the marketplace?***

The market is constantly evolving but services generally include:

- **Medical Information Record or Personal Health Record:** A physical or electronic digital record containing your personal health information.  
*Limitation/Caution:* Be sure to ask how the confidentiality of your personal information is protected and under what circumstances, if any, it will be shared with other organizations. In order for one's personal medical information to be made available in the event of an emergency, this record needs to be combined with a mechanism to make it available to emergency medical personnel such as an emergency medical information service and medical ID.
- **Medical Information Card:** A card imprinted with medical information such as conditions, medications, medical history, insurance information, and names of your physicians.  
*Limitation/Caution:* If you print one from the internet or make one yourself, there is a risk the card will not be recognized as it cannot be validated as clinically trustworthy information. There is also a risk of the paper being destroyed or deteriorating in your wallet. If you're allergic to latex, be sure to look for an organization that produces latex free wallet cards.
- **Pre-engraved Medical ID:** A wearable medical identification tag such as a bracelet or other form of jewelry, with one condition pre-engraved on it. These types of IDs can usually be bought online, in a drug store or other retail establishments.  
*Limitation/Caution:* Due to engraving limitations and lack of an associated emergency information service, this option is not recommended for individuals with multiple or complex conditions. It's best if you can find a pre-engraved medical ID that also comes bundled with a 24/7 emergency response service.
- **Custom Engraved Medical ID:** A wearable medical identification such as a bracelet or other form of jewelry that is custom engraved with specific medical information appropriate to your medical history or conditions.  
*Limitation/Caution:* Seek the advice of the medical ID maker to understand what types of medical information are most appropriate to engrave on your ID. Also, be aware that only some ID makers (such as MedicAlert Foundation) engrave medical information according to nationally accepted engraving standards to ensure your information is recognizable and understood by first responders and medical personnel in the event of an emergency.

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- **Personal Alarm Service:** This is a service that normally comes with a device or “button” that will signal an alarm when pressed to alert a central service that you're having an emergency. High-end models connect you with a live operator.  
*Limitation/Caution:* In most cases, this service only works if you are in close proximity to the device and transmitter, and are conscious at the time of an emergency. Some services such as Phillips Lifeline have a feature that automatically signals an emergency response center if you fall. If you want coverage when away from home you should consider coupling this service with a wearable medical ID.
- **Medical ID bundled with Emergency Medical Information Service:** This offering is exemplified by MedicAlert Foundation's core products and services. It combines a medical ID and emergency information service that connects authorized first responders, hospitals, and doctors to a more comprehensive view of your medical information at the time of need, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.  
*Limitation/Caution:* Be sure to understand the organization's emergency information response capabilities and the privacy policies they have in place for storing and sharing your information.

### ***Why do I need a medical ID or emergency service?***

- **Emergency Medical Information Record or Personal Health Record:** If you want your medical information (details of your medical conditions, your medications, etc.) to be maintained and organized for your convenience, you should build an emergency medical information record or personal health record (PHR). However, unless you make specific arrangements or purchase an emergency information service, there will be no reliable way to communicate your pertinent health details to a first responder, hospital, and/or physician in the event you cannot do so.
- **Medical Information Card:** If you want to have your medical information available in case of an emergency but don't want to wear a medical ID, an emergency medical card may be right for you. However, if you print it out on paper, you must replace the paper periodically as it can deteriorate in a wallet. Printing your information on a plastic card or laminating a paper card will help ensure its durability.
- **Pre-engraved Medical ID:** If you have only one medical condition or a very simple medical history and don't want accompanying emergency information services, a pre-engraved medical identification tag may be right for you.
- **Custom Engraved Medical ID:** You may want to custom engrave your medical ID if you have multiple medical conditions or perhaps a rare medical condition. In the case of multiple conditions, be sure to consult a physician or the medical ID service provider for appropriate engraving options.

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- **Personal Alarm Service:** If you live alone and have conditions that limit your movement or put you at higher risk of falling (e.g., balance disorders, Meniere’s Disease, etc.) or experiencing fractures (e.g., Osteoporosis), a personal alarm service may be right for you. However, remember these services generally only work at home and you will need other services such as a wearable medical ID if you plan to leave your home to travel, shop or visit family and friends. You would be limited to your home for the protection provided by this service.
- **Medical ID bundled with Emergency Information Services:** If you want to be sure your health information is accessible to first responders, hospitals and/or doctors in the event of an emergency anywhere or at anytime, a medical ID bundled with live 24/7 emergency information services may be right for you. See MedicAlert Foundation's products and services for more information.

### ***What if I have needs beyond the typical scenario?***

You should look for organizations that offer add-on services depending on your needs such as:

- *I travel periodically and want first responders to have access to my Emergency Medical Information Record. What type of service is right for me?*  
Look for an organization that has national or international coverage, along with emergency information services.
- *I have a heart condition and baseline EKG/ECG in my record. What type of service is right for me?*  
If you want your EKG/ECG data available in an emergency, look for an organization that allows you to store documents like these in an Emergency Medical Information Record in order to be retrieved by authorized medical personnel in the event of an emergency.
- *I am a caregiver for an Alzheimer’s patient. What service is right for me? What service is right for my loved one with Alzheimer’s?*  
If you are a caregiver, we recommend you choose an organization that collects emergency contact information or offers a family notification service so that you will be notified if your loved one has an emergency or if you have an emergency so that family members will be notified and other arrangements can be made for the loved one who depends on you. If your loved one has Alzheimer’s, you should look for an organization that supports missing and found cases as well as family notification services.
- *I live alone and I’m afraid I will fall at home and not be able to obtain help for myself.*  
You should look for a personal alarm service. There are many organizations that sell these products and services as stand-alone service or as an add-on service.

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- *I have a pacemaker. What service is right for me?*  
You should seek an organization that offers medical IDs coupled with an emergency information service and makes specific provisions for information about medical devices. Specifically, look to see if the provider asks for your make, model, and serial number and if there is an add-on service for device information document storage. Emergency responders, as well as MRI technicians, will need information regarding your pacemaker.
- *I have an Advance Directive. Can a medical ID/emergency service help me communicate this in a time of need?*  
Yes, but not all ID providers have this service available. Look for an organization that provides medical IDs linked to a live 24/7 emergency information service that makes specific provisions for advance directives and also handles document storage. Advance directives are legal documents that must meet requirements that vary by state or country.

### **What type of organization should I be looking for?**

There are many different types of organizations selling these products and/or services. Be sure to look for an organization that:

- Treats medical information with privacy and has policies to maintain the confidentiality of your medical and personal information.
- Ensures the security of your financial transactions with it.
- Is endorsed by trusted organizations.
- Is an organization that informs first responders regarding its products and services so that EMS/fire/law enforcement agencies know what to look for.
- Is socially responsible. Is it a for-profit or a nonprofit organization? Although for many this is secondary to the value and price of the service or product, it may help to sift through the plethora of organizations in the marketplace.
- Ensure that the company's services and procedures are regularly reviewed by trained medical professionals to stay current with clinical advances and the rapidly advancing trends in electronic medical records.
- Has clinically based standards for what is engraved, and in what order, while using nationally recognized medical abbreviations and terminology.

### **How do I know what information should be engraved?**

- Serious medical conditions should be engraved. If you have two or more conditions and engraving space is limited on the jewelry, look for an organization that follows clinical protocols. Ask the organization for its recommendation and if it has an engraving policy

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and trained personnel with medical expertise to help you. If it does not, it may be an indication that you should look elsewhere for your service. You may also want to consult with your physician.

- Remaining space on the medical ID should not be filled with extraneous data that has little or no impact on emergency treatment.
- Only use abbreviations that are acceptable by standard setting organizations in your country such as the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Health Organizations or similar bodies. If you are not sure, look for an organization that can provide support in this area.
- Certain lifestyle behaviors or activities that may be relevant in an emergency (e.g., scuba diver, etc.)

### **What happens in an emergency?**

This depends on what type of product and/or service you've purchased and whether you are in any condition to speak for yourself.

- Medical Information Record or Personal Health Record only: No mechanism exists to relay your medical information record to first responders on your behalf if you cannot do so yourself.
- Medical Information Card only: It is possible that an emergency responder may find this card in your wallet. If you're conscious at the time of the emergency, you can provide the card yourself.
- Pre-engraved medical ID only: The emergency responder may read your ID and therefore have an idea of your ailment. Without being coupled with a 24/7 emergency response service, Emergency responders will not have any knowledge of other issues such as your medications list.
- Custom engraved medical ID only: The emergency responder may read your ID and therefore have an idea of your ailment(s). Again without a 24/7 emergency response service, the emergency responder will not have any detailed backup information regarding your conditions or medications.
- Personal Alarm Service: Under most services, a live operator is ready to respond to your emergency (only if you're close to your device), but may not have critical health information to share with EMS. Also, carefully check the nature of the service to see whether the service only calls 911 (or similar emergency numbers in other countries such as 111 in New Zealand) or calls the emergency number and is capable of providing critical medical information about you to treating emergency responders.
- Medical ID bundled with emergency information services: You will be identified using the unique number so your medical information may be accessed for further details.

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Access may be handled either online, phone, or fax. Depending on the service, your family or emergency contacts may be notified either by phone or text message. If you have documents stored with this type of service provider, those documents will also be available to emergency responders.

### ***How do I know emergency responders will look at my medical ID?***

There is no absolute guarantee. However, most first responders are actively informed to look for medical IDs as part of their training. Some providers also conduct additional training and offer education to first responders to look for their medical IDs. These efforts will increase your chances of success in a time of need.

### ***What kind of product and return policy should I be looking for?***

- **Product**: Look for a product that complies with product safety guidelines (e.g., US Consumer Product Safety Commission). Make sure the organization has an active testing program to ensure products comply with all consumer protection requirements. If you're buying the bracelet for a child, make sure it is child safe and doesn't pose a choking hazard.
- **Resizing**: Certain items are not simple to purchase on the internet such as, bracelets or shoes. These items require precise sizing. Therefore, many online retailers are offering free shipping for exchanges or returns. Look for an organization that makes resizing a painless experience. They should offer free resizing within a reasonable grace period for applicable products
- **Recycling**: Look for a provider that offers a "recycling" program for your old unwanted medical IDs, so that they are destroyed in a safe and ecologically friendly manner. Equally important this serves to protect your medical information.

### ***Do health insurance companies or government health programs cover the cost of a medical ID and/or emergency information services? Are these services tax deductible?***

#### ***What if I can't afford it?***

Many insurance providers and government health programs currently do not cover the cost of a medical ID and emergency information services. Check with your health insurance provider. However, there may be third-party patient advocacy organizations that may help sponsor (or partially sponsor) you depending on your condition. Also, check with the medical ID service provider to see if they have a program to help people in need. Some Medical ID services sponsor the cost of the program for individuals meeting financial eligibility and with financial documentation. In addition, you can look for programs in your

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country that allow you to use pre-tax monies to purchase a medical IDs such as flexible spending account in the United States

**MedicAlert Foundation International Customer Service Phone Numbers:**

|                |               |
|----------------|---------------|
| Australia      | 1800-88-22-22 |
| Canada         | 800-668-1507  |
| Cyprus         | 357-22-315113 |
| Iceland        | 533-4567      |
| Malaysia       | 603-79601355  |
| New Zealand    | 0800-840-111  |
| South Africa   | 086-111-2979  |
| United Kingdom | 0800-581-420  |
| United States  | 800-432-5378  |
| Zimbabwe       | 263-4-704489  |

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