

This 'ICE' could save your life

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It's a scary scenario that plays out in hospitals across the country thousands of times every year: A senior living alone suffers an incapacitating health crisis. Paramedics rush her to the hospital where medical professionals do their best to sustain her until they can locate a family member or other responsible party authorized to make decisions on her behalf.

"When a medical crisis occurs for a senior, time is of the essence," said Lawrence Meigs, CEO of Visiting Angels, an organization that provides in-home care for thousands of seniors across the country. "Anything that delays decisions can mean the difference not only between life and death, but quality of life for the victims after they survive their crisis."

More than 10 million seniors live alone in the United States, according to U.S. Census bureau statistics. The good news, Meig said, is that seniors don't have to live in fear that medical professionals won't be able to reach decision-making loved ones in case of an emergency. Peace of mind can be had courtesy of three simple letters: "ICE."

The acronym stands for "In Case of Emergency." When programmed into a cell phone along with the contact number for a relative, friend, or other responsible party, "ICE" can help emergency responders quickly and easily reach someone authorized to make decisions on a senior's behalf.

Conceived by Cambridge, England, paramedic Bob Brotchie, the ICE system also enables you to provide multiple emergency contacts. Simply enter "ICE1," "ICE2," etc. into the phone to designate primary, secondary or even tertiary emergency contacts. Across the country, emergency responders are being trained to check cell phones for ICE, and some cell phone manufacturers are already making phones pre-programmed will tile function.

"We strongly urge everyone, but especially seniors, to use the ICE system," said Jill Stewart, who heads the Charlotte, N.C., branch of Visiting Angels, "Recently we had a client with dementia who got up every morning to visit his wife in a nursing home about a mile away from his house. One day the highway patrol found him traveling 70 mph on a state route with a posted limit of 45. He was 50 miles from home and only pulled over because he realized he was lost. He never noticed the flashing lights or sirens of the police cruiser.

"Needless to say in his state of confusion it took a long time for the highway patrol to figure out who he was, where he was from and who to contact," she said "If he had ICE, it would have made a huge difference."

Tips for using ICE

Talk to your emergency contact and be sure they're aware you'll be programming their information into your phone under the ICE designation. They should have a list of people to contact on your behalf, including relatives, your personal physician and employer,

Program your phone with every number your contact person uses — home, cell and office. That way if your ICE partner works a full-time job, emergency responders won't waste time trying to reach them at home during the day.

Be sure to alert your ICE partner to any medical conditions, such as allergies or current medications that could affect your emergency treatment.

Always include the first name of your ICE partner when entering information into your phone, For example: ICE_Heather.

Enter ICE TEXT before the name of your preferred contact if that person is hearing impaired, This lets responders know to use a special communications device that allows a speaking person to make a call to a non-hearing individual.

Place an "ICE" sticker on or near your photo ID or directly on the cell phone.

Consider setting your phone's wallpaper to read "ICE Loaded" to alert emergency personnel that the emergency contact system is in place on your phone.

For a free brochure on the ICE system, go to VisitingAngels.com.



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