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Autonomic Response to Beeper

To the Editor: As a family physician for 25 years I, of course, carried a conventional "beeper" for most of that time. I was in a very busy clinical practice, receiving many telephone calls and being paged frequently. It subsequently came to pass that in response to the beeper beeping, I would develop an anxiety syndrome, complete with tachycardia, diaphoresis, and just an uncomfortable feeling.

I was relieved, therefore, when the new technology was introduced that allowed one to be "vibrated." I fastened the new beeper more or less on the right side and was delighted to have no interruptions by the piercing shrill beep that had made me so uncomfortable. It soon happened, however, that I would be awakened in the middle of the night with a vibratory sensation in the area where my beeper was ordinarily carried. But I was not wearing a beeper. In short, I was having a tactile hallucination in the area of the beeper, which, of course, I found somewhat alarming and unacceptable.

I now carry a wrist beeper that alerts me with one gentle, almost inaudible "ding," which I find much more acceptable and does not seem to elicit the autonomic response that the previous old-fashioned beeper did. I am also happy to report that my tactile hallucinations have resolved. I would be interested to know whether any of your other colleagues have had similar experiences with paging devices.

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