

Care Partner Information

Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementia Caregiving Tips

Wandering

People with dementia may wander. They get confused about where they are or where they want to go, and they walk away or get lost. Sometimes people with dementia will try to go find a place they once were or look for something that they don't own any more. Or, sometimes they just walk somewhere because they are bored or unhappy. Anyone with memory problems can wander.

Wandering can be dangerous when people get lost or go places where they can get hurt. Sometimes people with dementia will take a car and drive somewhere and get lost or get in an accident.

While anyone with dementia can wander at any time without warning, the following are some things you can look for that might mean the person is more at risk for wandering. Clues that someone might start wandering are on the table below:

Clues That a Person with Dementia is at Risk for Wandering

- Coming back from a walk or drive later than usual.
- Asking to go home when they are already home.
- Asking to go to work when they aren't working anymore.
- Walking back and forth or pacing.
- Getting lost at home – like not being able to find the bathroom.
- Being more confused when in public places.

If you are caring for someone who shows those clues, there are things you can try that make it less likely that they will wander and get lost. These things don't work all the time, but they can help. They are listed on the table on the top of the other side of this page.

This Care Partner Information page is part of a series on caregiving tips. They are written to help family and community caregivers, direct care workers and community health representatives care for someone with Alzheimer's disease or other types of dementia. Available in English and Spanish at www.aging.arizona.edu

Things to Do to Make Wandering Less Likely

- Keep the same schedule every day that includes exercising and being active.
- Make sure the person is comfortable. Make sure they don't have to go to the bathroom, or that they aren't hungry or thirsty.
- Avoid places that are very busy like the mall or grocery stores.
- Use chimes on the doors and windows that let you know when they open.
- Hide the car keys.
- Never leave the person alone at home or in the car.

You should also have a plan in case the person does wander. The table below shows what should be in the plan.

The Plan—Just in Case the Person Does Wander

- Let your neighbors know that the person you are caring for might wander. They should call you if they see the person walking out in the street.
- Keep a list of people to call in an emergency.
- Keep a recent photo of the person in a place you can find easily, in case you need to show it to the police.
- Get the person ID jewelry and put contact information in their wallet or pockets.
- Have the person wear a GPS tracking device.

Remember that when making a plan to keep the person safe from wandering, you should not do anything that can put them in danger. Don't lock them in the house. Don't use medicine to make them sleepy to keep them from wandering away.

If the person you are caring for does wander or go missing, it is important to stay calm. Look around the area where you last saw the person and call 911. Once the person is found, don't be angry with them. They didn't wander on purpose. People with dementia do things like this and they can't help it.

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