



Care Partner Information

Tips for Providing Older Adult Care

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 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, below are some things that might mean the person is more at risk for wandering.

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.

When caring for someone who shows those clues, there are things to try that make it less likely they will wander and get lost. These things don't work all the time, but they can help. They are listed on the next page.

This Care Partner Information page is part of a series on older adult caregiving tips. They are written to help family and community caregivers, direct care workers and community health representatives care for older adults. Available in English and Spanish at www.aging.arizona.edu

Care Partner Information

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.

It is a good idea to have a plan in case the person does wander. The table below shows what should be in the plan.

Have a plan in case the person wanders
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.

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

If the person wanders or goes missing, it is important to stay calm. Look around the area where the person was last seen 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.

Written By: Kelly A Raach Alzheimer's Association—Desert Southwest Chapter
Alzheimer's disease and Related Dementia ~ Care Partner Information

Edited by an interprofessional team from the University of Arizona Center on Aging,
Alzheimer's Association - Desert Southwest Chapter and Community Caregivers