

SENIOR INFORMATION & ASSISTANCE

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Alzheimer's Disease: Warning Signs and Reducing Wandering

10 Warning Signs of Alzheimer's Disease

Recent Memory Loss that Affects Job Skills - It's normal to occasionally forget assignments, colleagues' names, or a business associate's telephone number and remember them later. Those with dementia, such as Alzheimer's disease, may forget things more often, and not remember them later.

Difficulty Performing Familiar Tasks - Busy people can be so distracted from time to time that they may leave the carrots on the stove and only remember to serve them at the end of the meal. People with Alzheimer's disease could prepare a meal and not only forget to serve it, but also forget they made it.

Problems with Language - Everyone has trouble finding the right word sometimes, but a person with Alzheimer's disease may forget simple words or substitute inappropriate words, making his or her sentence incomprehensible.

Disorientation of Time and Place - It's normal to forget the day of the week or your destination for a moment. But people with Alzheimer's disease can become lost on their own street, not knowing where they are, how they got there or how to get back home.

Poor or Decreased Judgment – Healthy people can become so immersed in an activity that they temporarily forget the child they're watching. People with Alzheimer's disease could forget they are responsible for a child's care. They may also dress inappropriately, wearing several shirts or blouses.

Problems with Abstract Thinking - Balancing a checkbook may be disconcerting when the task is more complicated than usual. Someone with Alzheimer's disease could forget completely what the numbers mean and what needs to be done with them.

Misplacing Things - Anyone can temporarily misplace a wallet or keys. A person with Alzheimer's disease may put things in inappropriate places, such as an iron in the freezer, or a wristwatch in the sugar bowl.

Changes in Mood or Behavior - Everyone becomes sad or moody from time to time. Someone with Alzheimer's disease can exhibit rapid mood swings, from calm to tears to anger, for no apparent reason.

Changes in Personality - People's personalities ordinarily change somewhat with age. But a person with Alzheimer's disease can change drastically, becoming extremely confused, suspicious or fearful.

Loss of Initiative - It's normal to tire of housework, business activities, or social obligations, but most people regain their initiative. The person with Alzheimer's disease may become very passive and require cueing and prompting to become involved.

10 Tips to Reduce Wandering

Be Prepared – Wandering can happen at any time, and in any location. The best advice is to be prepared. The Alzheimer's Association has a Safe Return program. Call 1-800-272-3900, for more information.

Encourage Movement and Exercise – Share an exercise routine together in a safe enclosed area. This may reduce the hazard of wandering away.

Be Objective – Do not take the person's wandering behavior personally.

Be Aware of Hazards – Look around your environment for any potential hazards including fences, gates, bodies of water or pools, dangerous roads with traffic, steep stairs or high balconies, dense foliage. Change what you can or block access to hazards.

Secure your Living Area – Provide a safe and secure home. Place a lock on doors out of the normal line of vision – either high or low on doors. Use door knobs that prevent the person with Alzheimer's from opening doors. Other safety tips include: lock gates, fence your patio or back yard, install alarms or chimes on doors, camouflage doors, use signs and nightlights to guide the person safely.

Identify the Patient – Have the person wear an identification bracelet or necklace. Use sew-on labels or permanent markers to mark clothing. Place identification in pockets, on shoes, eyeglasses, keys, or in wallet.

Involve your Neighbors – Inform your neighbors of your loved one's condition so they can assist if wandering occurs. Keep their names and phone numbers handy in case of an emergency.

Involve the Police – Check with your local police department to see if they keep files of identification or fingerprints for people with Alzheimer's. Have the following information ready in case of an emergency: current photograph, name, age, hair color, eye color, height, weight, medical condition, allergies, and other identifying material.

Be Prepared for Other Modes of Wandering – Although most wandering occurs on foot, some people with Alzheimer's have been known to drive great distances away from home. Keep car keys out of sight, or temporarily disable the car. Also keep in mind other modes of public transportation including buses, trains, and airplanes.

*These tips were adapted from Alzheimer's Association information.