

Memory Moment Safety & Springtime

By: Amy Sobrino, MSW, co-founder of Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness

As the weather gets warmer and nicer, everyone will want to be outdoors going for walks, playing ball, or enjoying a barbecue. As a caregiver of a person with Alzheimer's disease or related dementia, this time can be especially difficult if your loved one has the common symptom of wandering. Wandering affects many people with dementia, and is characterized by a person walking to a place they might have known how to get to before, but with the dementia, can now get lost and not find their way back home. This can be very scary for families, especially if they begin to see warning signs of wandering. Some early signs may be more attention placed on getting outside, going home or to a certain location. With a few simple additions to your caregiving routine, you can help your loved one enjoy the beautiful weather safely. Here are a couple of strategies caregivers can put in place now to try to prevent wandering or help the situation if it does occur.

Door Alarms & Locks

For \$10 on Amazon, you can purchase a set of two GE Personal Security Door Alarms that either release a buzzer or chime tone when a door is opened. This helps caregivers know if their loved one goes outside, especially if they are busy working around the house or in a different room. While this does not prevent your loved one from going outside, it will alert you when that happens. If wandering is occurring at nighttime, another item to invest in would be a lock that is placed on the door either very high or very low on the door. A person with dementia might be able to open the lock they are used to on the door, but will have difficulty with one that is not in the line of sight.

Safety Bracelet

Another item to invest in would be a medical safety bracelet. Available online or through the Alzheimer's Association, these bracelets alert a person who might come across your loved one that they have dementia, and could contact the number listed on the bracelet to help them return home safely. The Alzheimer's Association also has versions of these bracelets that are equipped with GPS locators if you are looking for a more advanced bracelet. Visit them at alz.org and type in Safe Return Medic Alert for more information.

Home Additions

Simple strategies to prevent wandering also include placing an oversized stop sign on a door to prevent your loved one from opening it. While this strategy may not always work for families, it is an inexpensive strategy to try.

As well as the stop sign, another strategy that is often used is placing a dark mat near an exit. Because of dementia's effects of vision and depth perception, a person living with the disease may not be able to differentiate that it is a dark rug, and think that it is a hole in the ground, thus steering clear of that area. As with the stop sign, these strategies work very well for some, and less effective for others.

Daily Routine

Having a structured, daily routine can help keep symptoms like wandering under control. Be sure to have plenty of outdoor time and physical activity built into that schedule. Plan time throughout the day for your loved one to have plenty of activity doing hobbies they enjoy.

Make a plan

Notify close neighbors of your concerns, and enlist their help. Have a list of numbers to the local authorities in case your loved one wanders out of the home or on an outing. Be sure to have a current photo on hand to give to authorities.

While we can never guess when wandering may occur, having strategies and a plan in place can help prevent this from happening or put you in a better situation to deal with this symptom.

For more information about Memory Moment & Effingham Area Alzheimer's

Awareness, check out their website at www.effinghamalz.org. If you are a caregiver

and have specific questions or situations you would like information on, please feel free

to call Shannon Nosbisch at 217-663-0010 or Amy Sobrino at 618-363-8372.