

Tips to decrease wandering

*If the behavior is new, determine if there have been any big changes in their life. A recent move or change of caregiver can be stressful, and frustration and anxiety can cause wandering. Take extra care to calm them in stressful times, such as going on fewer outings and following a steady routine. A new medication could be causing agitation as a side effect; mention the wandering to the prescribing doctor.

*Look for a pattern in wandering episodes. If it always happens at night, it could indicate fear or loneliness and they may need extra support after dark. If it's at mealtimes, they may be hungry or thirsty and can't follow through on these desires. Some people wander at specific times linked to activities from their previous work life or other routines.

*Assess whether the person is busy enough. Boredom is a common cause of wandering. Have access to a variety of activities. Spend some time out-of-doors and with other people.

*Keep keys out of sight.

*Avoid crowds. Crowded situations can produce stress that leads to wandering once they are back home.

Basic Safety Precautions

*Don't let a wanderer go out alone.

*Don't leave them in the car while you run a "quick" errand.

*Make the house safer for walking. Remove throw rugs, eliminate clutter and low-to-the-ground hazards such as magazine racks or plants.

*Install nightlights. Illuminate preferred safe paths, especially hallways and rooms that are used most.

*Consider childproof locks for dangerous doors. Doors leading to stairways or the outdoors are the most important. Try plastic pinch-grip doorknob covers. Block sliding glass doors.

*Try new locks. A different door lock such as a high chain lock or a key lock for a door that once had a button lock, might work because it's difficult for them to learn new things

*Try a "Do Not Enter" sign on an exit door.

Try Safety Tools

*Look into alarms that signal movement. Bed pads or chair pads with wireless remote alarms or floor mats with remote alarms that go off only on a portable receiver the caregiver can carry around may help.

*Disguise dangerous doorways. Use visual cues that convey that the door is something else. Camouflage possibilities include painting the door to match a surrounding wall or hanging posters, mirrors, or murals on the door that are especially designed to make it look like a bookshelf or pantry shelf. Place a kitchen or dining room chair in front of the door. Put a similar colored cloth over the door knob so they don't see it.

Enlist the Help of Others

*Tell immediate neighbors about the person's Alzheimer's. Ask them to call you if they see her walking alone.

*Use daycare and professional help. Don't leave someone at home alone if they are starting to wander.

Be Prepared

*Enroll the person in the Safe Return program. This Alzheimer's Association-sponsored program is designed to provide help if a person with dementia wanders away. An enrolled person's identification information is immediately given to local law enforcement. The enrollee also receives an identification bracelet and clothing labels, which bear the 800 number of the program's help line. Anyone who finds the person wandering can call the number.

*Consider identification. Have identification on the person that gives their name, disease and a contact number.

*Keep track of clothes. If they are a chronic wanderer, have them dressed in bright colors that are easily identified and found.

*Keep a recent photo handy. An up-to-date photo will help searchers identify them if they are lost.

*The State of Illinois now has the “Silver Alert” program, which is similar to the “Amber Alert” program.