

Dementia and walking

The desire to walk around outside is quite normal for most people, including people living with dementia. When you are caring for a person living with dementia it can be difficult to balance a person's need for independence with concerns about risk and safety. Staying physically and socially active is important for people living with dementia so it is vital to support and enable independence.

Why do people with dementia walk?

People with dementia, like all people, walk for a variety of reasons, including:

- » Continuing a habit: such as going to work or meeting children after school
- » Relieving boredom
- » Lack of physical activity
- » Relieving discomfort or pain
- » Responding to anxiety
- » Restlessness

However, dementia may cause individuals to be confused and disorientated and walk to look for familiar places, for example, a previous home. Involving your loved one with dementia in identifying the reasons why they feel the need to walk around may help you to find other ways to meet their needs.

Helpful hints

Consider the following to keep a person with dementia safe while walking:

- » Know the person's regular walking route, and how long it usually takes them to walk it
- » Walk with your loved one, or have a friend walk with them
- » Join a walking group for people living with dementia
- » Ensure your loved one wears well-fitting shoes to reduce the risk of a fall
- » Encourage walking during the day and in areas where there are usually other people

Decide together on any changes to routine or environment, ensuring that any changes are individual, simple, and dignified.

If a person with dementia becomes confused or disoriented while walking this can lead to them becoming lost, even if they are in previously familiar surroundings.

- » A person living with dementia who walks regularly should carry identification which includes their name, address and an emergency contact number.
- » Encourage your loved one to wear an identification bracelet, have identification and emergency contact details in their wallet or purse, or carry a phone while walking.
- » It can be helpful for you to have a recent photograph on your loved one in the event of an emergency.

Assistive technology

There are a number of assistive technology devices available to help keep people living with dementia safe. Be sure to involve the person with dementia in any decisions to implement assistive technology if possible. A GPS device is no use if the person with dementia does not want to wear it.

- » Emergency Identification and Medic-Alert pendants and bracelets
- » GPS and monitoring devices. Try and get the person to wear a watch with GPS capability early in the journey. A waterproof watch will allow it to be worn all the time.
- » Door sensors and wireless door monitors
- » Exit reminders
- » Motion detectors

Alzheimer's WA has an assistive technology demonstration room with all the latest technology ideas and information located at Mary Chester House, Shenton Park. The display room is open from 9am - 4pm on weekdays. Call 1300 66 77 88 for more information.

How to communicate with a person living with dementia

Clients of Alzheimer's WA living with dementia in the community have developed five simple tips to help the wider community better connect with them and others living with dementia.

Talk to me - Please talk to me, not my carer, family member or friend. Don't prejudge my level of understanding.

Keep questions simple - Providing information in smaller chunks will really help me.

Body language - Make eye contact and speak clearly, use short sentences, with one idea at a time. Avoid jargon, as I might not understand.

Be patient and understanding - Sometimes it takes a little longer for me to process information and find the right answer. Don't rush me, allow me time to speak.

Distractions cause disruptions - Less noise and fewer distractions, such as bright lights, will help me to focus.

For copies of these tips on a postcard for you or to distribute in your community or workplace, please contact us on **1300 66 77 88** or email **support@alzheimerswa.org.au**.

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the dementia experts

For support on your dementia journey, information about dementia and how to access services to support you and your loved ones please contact our customer support team on:

1300 66 77 88 or **support@alzheimerswa.org.au**

or visit **alzheimerswa.org.au**

