

## Reducing the Risk of Becoming Lost

Many people with dementia like to take a walk, go to the shops or exercise the dog. Due to the impact of cognitive impairment a person with dementia may become disorientated to the place they are in, forget the route back to their desired location or decide to head to a location other than was first intended.

For many people with dementia the freedom, autonomy and choice of taking a walk is an important right that maintains their emotional wellbeing. Here are some useful tips to reduce the risk of a person getting lost, and what to do if you are concerned they are lost.

### Assess the risk

How likely is it that the person will become lost? Are there any warning signs from previous walks or occasions? Ask the person where they are going before they set off to determine if their intended location is what is expected.

It can be difficult to ascertain the real risk due to the nature of dementia and its effect on the person. If they are having a difficult day one wrong turn or distraction can cause the person to leave a normal route and become disorientated.

### Be aware

It is advisable to plan for worse case scenarios:

- » Make note of what the person is wearing and if they are carrying anything when they leave.
- » Ensure the person has identification and an emergency call number in their pocket.
- » If they are comfortable with carrying an information note about their memory difficulty that can be helpful.

- » If the person will wear it, an emergency identification bracelet can be helpful for when the person is found in order to alert the family quickly.

Keep a record of the person's features such as:

- » Height, weight and distinguishing features, such as wearing glasses
- » Any health conditions and medications they may be on
- » Previous home addresses
- » Favourite places to walk

A recent photo of the person is also important. This pre-prepared information can be very helpful if you need to report the person missing to the police and saves trying to remember important information at a stressful time.

### Reduce the risk

- » If the person is going to the bathroom in a shopping centre ensure you wait for them in line of sight of the exit. Be mindful many shopping centre toilets are down corridors with two exit points.
- » Take note of how long is a normal time for the person to be out walking and set an alarm to alert you if the person is gone longer than normal.
- » If the person is deemed to be at significant risk consider accompanied walks as an alternative, either with friends, family or a community care service provider
- » If they will carry one, ensure they have a mobile phone on them that is charged and switched on.
- » Consider using assistive equipment that will alert you the person is leaving the house or immediate area, or equipment that can locate the person if they are lost such as GPS devices.

## Helpful equipment

There are a range of technology solutions that can prove very useful if someone is lost. These include GPS location devices, tags that can be attached to handbags or wallets that will alert you if the person has left a certain area, door alerts that will wake you if the person leaves the house during the night, and apps on phones that can help find the phone.



A selection of this equipment can be found on the [Alzheimer's WA website](#) or the [Independent Living Centre website](#). Equipment can also be viewed at our Assistive Technology Demonstration Room located at 9 Bedbrook Place, Shenton Park. Please call 1300 66 77 88 to book a visit.

## What to do if the person becomes lost

If the person has been gone longer than normal, or is not where you expected them to be:

1. Carry out an immediate search of the area. If in a shopping centre alert the customer information desk straight away.
2. Alert the police if an immediate search fails to find the person. Don't be afraid to alert them quickly. The longer a person is missing the larger a police search area becomes.
3. Ensure you have the persons details ready when reporting to the police including what they are wearing, if known, and any health conditions and distinguishing features. A recent photo is also very helpful.
4. Get support for yourself. When a person goes missing it can be a very stressful time for everyone involved.

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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](mailto:support@alzheimerswa.org.au)

or visit [alzheimerswa.org.au](http://alzheimerswa.org.au)