

Wandering

When someone has memory loss or dementia, it can be easy to become disoriented and confused, even in familiar places. **Wandering** is common among those with dementia and can be dangerous if ignored. Being aware and being prepared for this common behavior will help keep the person with memory loss safe and give you greater peace of mind.

Understand Wandering

Everyone with memory loss is at risk for wandering. The disease can cause many changes in the brain, including difficulty recognizing people and places, inability to know what is real vs. imagined, difficulty remembering important facts (like name and address) and more. Often, someone who is wandering is:

- **Searching:** People who wander are often looking for something or someone familiar, especially if they have recently moved to a new environment. In other cases, they may be trying to satisfy a basic need, such as hunger, thirst or the need to use the bathroom but have forgotten what to do or where to go.
- **Escaping:** Wandering can be the result of stress, anxiety or too much stimulation, such as multiple conversations, a loud television or visitors in the home.
- **Reliving the past:** If wandering occurs at the same time every day, it may be linked to a lifelong routine or responsibility, such as going to/from work, picking up children, etc.
- **Self-soothing:** Some individuals may feel the need to constantly stay in motion. They may be restless, make repetitive movements or pace.

Reduce the Risk of Wandering

There may not be warning before the first wandering incident but there are simple strategies to reduce wandering behavior and minimize the risk of injury. Consider these strategies:

- **Increase physical activity:** additional physical activity during the day may reduce the tendency to get up and walk around during the night (when wandering often happens).
- **Identify potential causes for wandering:** Wandering can be triggered by simple causes such as boredom, discomfort, hunger or need to use the bathroom.
- **Increase home safety measures:** Consider things similar to “child-proofing” the home, such as bells or a door chime that can signal when a door is being opened, motion detecting lights, locks on doors/windows that can’t be opened easily, night lights, etc. **for a complete list of home safety suggestions, ask an Alzheimer’s San Diego Social Worker.*
- **Provide visual cues:** People with dementia may forget where they are, even in their own home. It can help to post signs or photos on cabinets and doors to important rooms, such as the bedroom and the bathroom. Signs on a door that say “stop” or “do not enter” can help to prevent wandering.
- **Be aware of the environment:** Avoid busy places that can cause confusion, be aware of noise and

commotion and be sure basic needs are met. Remove items that suggest leaving, such as shoes, keys, suitcases, coats, hats, and purses near the door.

- **Keep unused doors locked:** Consider another lock on the door, use loosely fitting doorknob covers so that the cover turns instead of the actual knob, secure the yard with fencing and a locked gate. *Be sure these security measures do not limit the ability to exit quickly and safely in the event of an emergency.

Plan Ahead for Wandering

In the event someone wanders and becomes lost, it is important to act quickly. Be aware, have a plan and know who to call for assistance:

- People who get lost can be difficult to find because they often behave unpredictably. They may not call for help or respond to searcher's calls. Consider products to help with location and identification.
- Try to keep identification on the person with dementia at all times.
- Keep a current photo and list of medical conditions, medications and emergency contact info.
- Let neighbors and the local police know that the person with Alzheimer's tends to wander. Ask them to alert you immediately if the person is seen alone and on the move.
- Provide safe options for wandering: consider providing a safe place for walking and exploration, such as a path through the house or a trail through a fenced backyard.

In the event the individual with memory loss leaves a safe place or becomes lost, do not wait, contact 911 immediately. A missing person with dementia is considered to be "at risk" and will receive law enforcement response right away; there is no need to wait 24 hours as in other situations with a missing person.

Programs and options to reduce the risk of wandering

Take Me Home

www.sdsheriff.net

A confidential database for first responders to access critical information about the identity of an individual with special needs. A free program of the San Diego County Sheriff's Dept.

MediAlert

www.medicalert.org

A 24-hour nationwide emergency response service for individuals with Alzheimer's disease or a related dementia who are at risk for wandering or having a medical emergency.

Clothing Labels

Printed cloth labels that can be attached to clothing items to assist in identification. For a no-cost option, consider a permanent marker. Many options available online, including www.namemaker.com, www.label-land.com and www.itsminelabels.com

GPS and technology options to reduce the risk of wandering

Personal Emergency Response Systems and GPS Locators

Monitor location information via GPS and cellular technology. Devices vary from simple tracking device to personal emergency response with one-button assistance, geo-fencing, two-way voice communication* and fall detection.

*Lively	www.greatcall.com	\$49.99 + \$19.99/mo
Yepzon	www.yepzon.com	\$129 + \$5/mo
Take Along Tracker	www.portable-gps-devices.com	\$179 + \$18/mo
*GoSafe	www.lifelinesys.com	\$149 + \$55/mo
Pocketfinder	www.pocketfinder.com	\$129 + \$12.95/mo
Eyezon	www.eyezon.com	\$199 + \$19.99/mo
SafeLink	www.safelinkgps.com	\$169 + \$18.97/mo
*First Line Solutions	www.firstlinesolution.com	\$39.95 + \$24.95/mo
*VRI Mobile Care	www.vricares.com	\$35-40/mo

GPS Watches and Wristbands

GPS-enabled watches and wristbands that track location information. *Prices and fees vary.*

GizmoGadget / GizmoPal2	www.verizonwireless.com/connected-devices/lg/
Keruve	www.keruve.com
Senior GPS Bracelet	www.tracking-system.com/senior-gps-bracelet
Revolutionary Tracker	www.revolutionarytracker.com
iLoc Technologies	www.ilotech.com
Tracking System Direct	www.tracking-system.com
Bluewater Security	www.bluewatersecurityprofessionals.com

GPS SmartSole

www.gpsmartsole.com

GPS insole that can be inserted into almost any shoe. Includes wireless charger and tracking application for cell phone. \$299 + \$30-\$50/month

Safe Wander

www.safewander.com

Small wearable sensor that sends an alert to a mobile device when it detects the person getting up or walking away. Kit includes sensor, a gateway and charger. Free download of phone app. \$249

Phone Applications (“apps”)

Real time GPS tracking abilities through a smart phone, such as Life360 or Find my iPhone. Many available, most at no cost. Visit your phone’s app store or speak with your cell phone provider.

Additional information on various products

The Alzheimer’s Store – www.alzstore.com
 Smart Caregiver – www.smartcaregiver.com

1-800-752-3238
 1-800-650-3637