Preventing Your Loved One With Alzheimer’s From Wandering

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Alzheimer's and Wandering

If you’re taking care of a loved one who is affected by Alzheimer’s, you have all the reason to be concerned - as many as 60% of individuals diagnosed with this condition will wander and have troubles remembering basic things - like his name, or address. Luckily, you can learn about the warning signs and a few tips you can use to prevent your loved one from getting lost, confused or forgetful.

Warning Signs

Pay attention to how your loved one behaves. Generally speaking, anyone who has memory problems and is mobile (can walk) can be at risk of wandering, whether the dementia is in an early or late stage. Furthermore, someone is more likely to wander if he returns later than usual from a walk, if he tries to go to work (although he is retired), or if he wants to go home (although he is already home). He may be more restless, or have troubles finding the bathroom in the home. He may seem to be more confused when changing the environment.

Tips to Prevent Wandering

1. **Organize the day, having a routine is important** – plan for him to wake up/go to sleep at the same time every day, use the same exercise routine or eat meals in the same place
2. **Identify the triggers** - What makes him more confused or forgetful and when? If he feels more lost in the morning, allow him to rest at that time, and plan all the activities later in the day. When he is confused, he feels lost and abandoned – kindly re-assure him that he is in a safe place, and you will be there for him
3. **Avoid changing the environment too often** - this would increase the confusion and disorientation. When at home, he should be supervised at all times, and never be left alone

4. **Place high or low locks on the doors** - You can even camouflage doors by painting them with the same color as the walls, or cover them with curtains. He will be less likely to try to leave the home without supervision. You may invest in an electronic alarm system that becomes activated when a door is open, or use a bell just above the door
5. **Hide the car keys, in case he may want to go for a drive** - He should have an ID jewelry (enroll him in Medic Alert program)
6. **Use night lights throughout the home** - in case he needs to take trips to the washroom
7. **Have a plan**- what can you do in case of an emergency and if the dementia becomes severe? Make a list with all family members, neighbors and friends who could help you and have their phone numbers handy. Also make a list of all possible places where he could wander or get lost (it could be past job places, restaurants or other locations that he used frequently)
8. **Wandering usually follows the direction of the dominant hand** - it will be easier to guess in which direction you'll start searching for him