

Wandering, Prevention, and Technology

Wandering is a term used to describe getting lost and becoming disoriented. Although it is a common behavior associated with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias, wandering is often overlooked as a concern among families and caregivers.

Understand wandering

Everyone with memory loss is at risk for wandering. Changes in the brain can cause a person with dementia to become confused and disoriented, even when in a familiar place. Often, someone who is wandering is:

- **Searching for something:** Wanderers 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 from something:** 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.

Prevent wandering

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

- Always provide supervision and be sure the person with memory loss is never left alone.
- Increase home safety measures, such as devices that signal when a door is opened, night lights, window locks and stair gates to prevent falls.
- Provide visual cues: People with dementia may forget where they are, even when inside their own home. It can help to post signs or photos on cabinets, drawers and doors to important rooms, such as their bedroom and the bathroom.
- Avoid potential triggers and be aware of the environment. Avoid busy places that can cause confusion, be aware of noise and activity levels and be sure basic needs are met.
- Remove items that suggest leaving, such as a purse or car keys near the front door.

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:

- Let friends and neighbors know of the person's memory loss so they can be aware (and alert someone) if they see the person alone.
- Provide a place to wander safely. Consider providing a safe place for walking and exploration, such as a path through the house or fenced backyard.
- Keep an updated photo and a list of places where the person may wander, including past jobs, restaurants and other favorite places.

- Wanderers 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.

Low-Technology Options

MedicAlert FOUND California

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 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

Comfort Zone

A locator device worn by the individual or mounted in the car, connected to an online location-based mapping service. “Zones” can be set to be alerted when the person leaves a certain area. Plans start at \$45/month + one-time \$45 activation fee. www.alz.org/comfortzone

Personal 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.

Take Along Tracker	www.portable-gps-devices.com	\$149 + \$18/month
GoSafe	www.lifelinesys.com	\$149 + \$54.95/month
Pocketfinder	www.pocketfinder.com	\$129 + \$12.95/month
Eyezon	www.eyezon.com	\$199 + \$19.95/month
Safelink	www.safelinkgps.com	\$169 + \$18.97/month

GPS Watches and Wristbands

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

Keruve	www.keruve.com
Senior GPS Bracelet	www.tracking-system.com/senior-gps-bracelet
Revolutionary Tracker	www.revtrackbuy.com
iLoc Technologies	www.iloctech.com
Tracking System Direct	www.tracking-system.com
Bluewater Security	www.bluewatersecurityprofessionals.com

GPS SmartSole

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

Phone Applications

Many smart phones have real time GPS tracking abilities. There are many applications available, most at no cost. Visit your phone’s app store or speak with your cell phone provider.

AlzOC reviewed December 2015