



Alzheimer Awareness

Tips for Keeping Individuals at Risk of Getting Lost Safe

January is Alzheimer Awareness Month. The following tips may provide family members and those who are caring for someone with Alzheimer's disease or dementia, who wanders, with strategies to keep them safe.

Wandering is a common behaviour for a person with Alzheimer's disease. Wandering, like walking, is not in itself a dangerous activity. But short-term memory loss and the impaired ability to reason or to make sound judgments can contribute to unsafe wandering behaviour. It is important to develop multiple strategies for ensuring the safety of an individual with Alzheimer's disease or dementia.

Your Physical Environment

- If there are doors to the outside that you do not want the individual to open, place locks where they cannot reach or see them. If they are able to get past the locks, a bell or alarm that signals when the door is opened is a good safety precaution. Consider camouflaging exits and providing distractions at those points (e.g. baskets for rummaging).
- A fenced backyard can ensure that the individuals with Alzheimer's disease are able to wander safely outdoors.
- Consider technological devices such as a sound-sensitive monitor placed in the same area as the individual that can help you keep track of their whereabouts within the house.

Establish Community Contact

- Let others in your neighbourhood know about the potential of the individual with Alzheimer's disease to wander.
- Ask friends, neighbours, local businesses and if you have Block Watch in your neighbourhood, to stay alert to the possibility, and to call you if they suspect that the individual is disoriented.

Prepare an Identification Kit:

- Ensure the individual has identification on them at all times. Options include identification bracelets or necklaces and locating devices.
- An Identification Kit is a tool to help you organize vital information on the person you are caring for, such as a physical description and medical conditions. Check your Identification Kit often to ensure that no changes need to be made, such as changing the photograph if the individual's appearance has changed.
- Identification Kits can be downloaded from the Alzheimer Society of BC at www.alzheimerbc.org/wandering.aspx or by contacting your local Alzheimer Society of BC resource centre.
- If the individual has access to credit cards or bank cards, you may want to include these card numbers in the identification kit so the credit card you can notify the credit card companies or bank that a person with Alzheimer's disease is missing and may use the cards. Tracking the use of the credit cards may help in locating the person.
- Be sure to keep two copies of the Identification Kit – one for yourself and one to give police in an emergency.

If Wandering has Taken Place

- Check common areas. Try and get a sense of how long the person has been gone. Look inside the house, including the basement, before expanding your search to the outdoors. Check to see if any items such as luggage, car keys or credit cards are missing.
- Contact the police. Do not delay! – When someone with Alzheimer's disease or dementia goes missing, it is an emergency. Immediately inform police that the person has Alzheimer's disease (or dementia). Once the police arrive, share with them the information you have assembled in the "Identification Kit"
- If you will be involved in the search for the person, ensure someone stays at home in case the individual returns. At the same time, alert friends and neighbours that the person is missing.

For additional information and resources please visit the Alzheimer Society of BC at www.alzheimerbc.org, or contact your local Alzheimer resource centre.