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Herkimer County OFA & NY Connects
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Caregiving in The Comfort of Home®

Caregiver Assistance News

"CARING FOR YOU...CARING FOR OTHERS"

Wandering with Alzheimer's Disease

One of the most troubling aspects of Alzheimer's (AD) is the person's tendency to wander away from home. There is no way to predict who will wander or when it might happen. However, some of the reasons can be pain or restlessness, side effects of medication, a noisy or stressful environment, an attempt to meet basic needs (finding the toilet) or trying to meet former obligations to job or family.

Wandering may also be a natural release for boredom or agitation. If this is the reason, wandering within a safe confined space may be encouraged. When faced with episodes of wandering, try to find their cause.

Reduce the Chance of Wandering

You cannot always prevent wandering, but you can do many things to reduce the chances it will happen.

- Provide opportunities for **exercise**. Exercise might include singing, rhythmic movements, walking at an indoor mall, or dancing. Develop areas indoors and outdoors where the person can explore and wander independently and safely.
- **Reduce noise** and confusion, particularly at mealtimes.
- **Clearly label** bathrooms, living rooms, and bedrooms with large letters or pictures. Try attaching a yellow strip of plastic, symbolizing caution, across doors to prevent wanderers from entering or leaving the room. Place a large NO on doors.
- **Camouflage doors** by painting exit doors the same color as the walls or cover doors with curtains. Place a full-length mirror on doors to the outside. Some people will turn around when they see the image, not recognizing themselves.

- **Install electronic alarms** or chimes on windows and doors.
- **Monitor medication** for changes, especially anti-depressants or anti-anxiety drugs.
- Determine whether wandering is related to previous lifestyles. Find out how the person coped with change and stress and **learn about patterns** of physical exercise and lifetime habits, both at home and at work. (Did the person always react to an argument by going out and walking for an hour? Did he always jog in the afternoon?) Have a plan of action if wandering occurs.

Article continues on page 2

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Safe Return Program

If you are the authorized caregiver or a family member, you can register the person in your care with the Alzheimer's Association's Safe Return Program. The Alzheimer's Association, in collaboration with MedicAlert® Foundation, provides membership plans with 24/7 Wandering Support. Call 800-432-5378 or visit www.alz.org/safereturn for details.

Getting started is easy: Choose your medical ID and engrave it with the most critical info and select a membership plan that best suits your needs. Enjoy peace of mind knowing you or your loved one are protected with MedicAlert. Products are mailed in six to eight weeks. Having the identifying information and a picture stored in a national database will increase chances of finding someone even if they refuse to wear the bracelet.

Call the Safe Return Hotline at 800-572-1122 as soon as possible when the registrant moves or goes on vacation so Safe Return always has up-to-date information.

Preparing for a Safe Return

Prevention is the best cure, but if you can't prevent your loved one from wandering, here is a checklist of things that will make it easier for them to be found.

- Note what the person is wearing each day.
- Have photos available to give to the police and searchers.
- Have information on age, height, weight, hair and eye color, physical disabilities, and other identifying features.
- Know if the person has any medical problems or takes medication.
- Note the person's favorite places to go, "hang outs" and familiar sites.
- Put bells on the doors to alert you when they are opened.
- Be aware of nearby hazards such as bodies of water, dense foliage, construction sites, high cliffs, steep stairways, high balconies, busy roads, fences, and gates.
- Know if the person can use a bus or a taxi.
- Keep unwashed clothing or wipe clean cotton balls on the person's face or arm. Put the balls in individual Ziploc bags, and store them in the freezer. Tracking dogs can use them to pick up a scent.

When the missing person is found, call the police and the Safe Return program (800-572-1122).

Source: Alzheimer's Association

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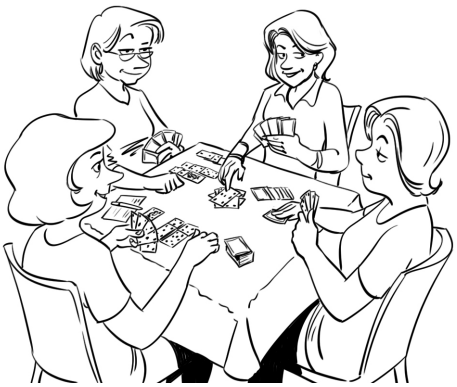
Taking Care of Yourself— Hobbies are Good for You

Research suggests that how you spend leisure time matters to your health, and that your hobbies are good for you in many ways. People who scored higher on the enjoyable activities test had lower body mass index, smaller waists, lower blood pressure, lower stress hormones and better overall physical function. Between caregiving and work, you may have little time or energy left for hobbies. But without them, life feels mundane. Squeeze them in, even if it's for just a few minutes at a time, because those moments improve your mood and your mind-set. When you're really engaged in a hobby you love, you lose sense of time and enter what's called a flow state—and that restores your mind and energy. Making time for enjoyable activities stimulates parts of the brain associated with creative and positive thinking. Spending more time on hobbies associated with having a larger and more diverse social network is a key factor in healthy aging.



Inspiration

I personally think we developed language because of our deep inner need to complain.

—Lily Tomlin

Live Life Laughing!

Memory Care - Be Patient

Your schedule may be overwhelming, but the person in your care is on her own schedule. Allow more time than usual for simple tasks. Too many activities at once can provoke a negative reaction because the person feels overwhelmed.

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Your donations are important part of offsetting the cost of the Caregiver Newsletter. If you would like to donate send donations to :

Herkimer County Office For the Aging
Caregiver Newsletter
109 Mary St, Suite 1101, Herkimer, NY 13350

Alzheimer's Support Group:

1)At FoltsBrook (Claxton) meets the second Tuesday of each month at 6pm in the Claxton Conference Room, 104 N Washington St, Herkimer. For additional information, call the Social Services Department at (315) 866-6964 ext 260.

2)Little Falls Community Center, 524 Main St. Meet the 2nd Thursday of the month at 6:00pm.

3) Weller Library, 41 W Main St, Mohawk. Meet the 1st & 3rd Wednesday of the month at 10:30am. Call Patricia at 315-269-5266 or 315-235-7143 to sign up.

Caregiving in The Comfort of Home®

Our Purpose

To provide caregivers with critical information enabling them to do their job with confidence, pride, and competence.

Ordering Info

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SAFETY TIPS– What Happens When People with AD Wander

- ➡ Of those with Alzheimer's or a related dementia, 59% will get lost, usually while doing normal activities.
- ➡ Of those not located within 24 hours of the last time seen, 46% may die, usually succumbing to cold and thirst.
- ➡ Individuals with Alzheimer's usually do not cry out for help or respond to shouts; they leave few physical clues.
- ➡ They usually travel less than one-tenth of a mile.
- ➡ They may try to travel to a former residence, work place, or city.
- ➡ They are usually found a short distance from a road or an open field; 63% are found in a creek or drainage area or caught in briars or bushes.
- ➡ Most wandering incidents occur during normal daily activities (while trying to locate a restroom, gift shop, recreation room, etc.).

NEXT ISSUE… NUTRITION / FOOD SAFETY

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QUICK QUIZ

Wandering is a common behavioral effect of dementia. According to the Alzheimer's Association, an estimated 60 percent of people with the condition will wander at some point. Answer True or False to the questions below.

1. Reducing noise and confusion, particularly at mealtimes, will not reduce the chance of wandering.

T F

2. One of the most troubling aspects of Alzheimer's (AD) is the person's tendency to wander away from home.

T F

3. Finding out how the person with AD coped with change and stress and learning about patterns of physical exercise and lifetime habits, both at home and at work will help you reduce the chance of wandering.

T F

4. Some people with AD will turn around when they see their image in a mirror, not recognizing themselves.

T F

5. If you can't prevent the person in your care from wandering, there are things that will make it easier for them to be found.

T F

6. It will not make it any easier to find the missing person if you have saved unwashed clothing.

T F

7. Spending more time on hobbies with a strong social network is a key factor in healthy aging.

T F

8. Wandering may also be a natural release for boredom or agitation.

T F

9. You cannot always prevent wandering, but you can do many things to reduce the chances it will happen.

T F

10. If you are the authorized caregiver or a family member, you can register the person in your care with the Alzheimer's Association's Safe Return Program.

T F

Name_____

Signature_____ Date_____

KEY: 1. F; 2. T; 3. T; 4. T; 5. T; 6. F; 7. T; 8. T; 9. T; 10. T

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