

Traveling with a Person with Dementia

If a person has Alzheimer's or other dementia, it doesn't mean he or she can no longer participate in meaningful activities such as travel; but it does require planning to ensure safety and enjoyment for everyone.

Deciding to travel

Whether taking a short trip to see friends and family or traveling a great distance for vacation, it's important to weigh the potential difficulties and benefits of travel for a person with dementia. In the early stages of dementia, a person may still enjoy traveling. As the disease progresses, travel may become too overwhelming.

When you take into account the needs, abilities, safety and preferences of the person with dementia, what's the best mode of travel?

- › Go with the option that provides the most comfort and the least anxiety.
- › Stick with what you and your person know. Travel to destinations that involve as few changes in daily routine as possible. Try to visit places that were familiar before the onset of dementia.
- › Keep in mind that there may come a time when traveling is too disorienting or stressful for the person with dementia.

Tips for a safe trip

- › Changes in environment can trigger wandering. Even for a person in the early stages, new environments may be more difficult to navigate. Keep the person safe by taking precautions, such as enrolling in Alzheimer's Association Safe Return[®], Comfort Zone[®] or Comfort Zone Check-In[®].
- › If you will be at a location for an extended period of time, consider contacting the local Alzheimer's Association (www.alz.org) for resources and support. You can also learn who the local Agency on Aging is by going to www.eldercare.gov and entering your US destination.

- › Create an itinerary that includes details about each destination. Give copies to emergency contacts at home.
- › Have a bag of essentials with you at all times that includes medications, your itinerary, a comfortable change of clothes, water, snacks and activities.
- › If you will be staying in a hotel, inform the staff ahead of time of your specific needs and any difficulties you think you might encounter so they can be prepared to assist you.
- › Travel during the time of day that is best for the person with dementia.
- › Prepare a packet with identifying information for your person to keep on them at all times. Include your contact information, your itinerary and where you are staying.

Documents to take with you when traveling

- › Doctors' names and contact information
- › Up-to-date medical information and a list of current medications and dosages
- › Phone numbers and addresses of the local police and fire departments, hospitals and poison control
- › A list of food or drug allergies
- › Copies of legal papers (living will, advanced directives, power of attorney, etc.)
- › Names and contact information of friends and family members to call in case of an emergency
- › Insurance information (policy number, member name)
- › Recent photograph, along with a description of your person
- › Information identifying yourself as a caregiver and identifying the person with dementia, so that, should you require emergency assistance, EMS personnel will be alerted to assist your person as well.

Air travel

Traveling in airports requires plenty of focus and attention. At times, the level of activity can be distracting, overwhelming or difficult to understand for someone with dementia. If you are traveling by plane, keep the following in mind:

- › Avoid scheduling flights that require tight connections. Ask about airport escort services that can help you get from place to place.
- › Inform the airline and airport medical service department ahead of time of your needs to make sure they can help you. Most airlines will work with you to accommodate special needs.
- › If appropriate, tell airport employees, screeners and in-flight crew members that you are traveling with someone who has dementia.
- › For airport security screening, it may be helpful to bring a doctor's note with the person's diagnosis. This may reduce the chances that you and your person will be separated during screening. Screening procedures, particularly those involving physical contact, may be upsetting or misinterpreted.
- › Even if walking is not difficult, consider requesting a wheelchair so that an airport employee is assigned to help you get from place to place.
- › Allow for extra time.

Visiting with family or friends

Prepare friends or family members for the visit by explaining the changes dementia may have caused in your person. Go over any special needs, and explain that the visit may be short or that you may need to change activities on short notice.

Enjoy your trip!