

## Wandering & Safely Home™

Wandering refers to the need to keep on the move. It is a common behaviour in individuals with Alzheimer Disease and is the direct result of physical changes in the brain. Wandering may appear to be aimless or confused, or it may be focused on getting to a particular destination or pursuing a specific goal. Wandering may occur at any time of the day or night and may take the individual out of the home, exposing them to dangers such as traffic or unsafe weather conditions.

In itself, wandering is not a harmful behaviour. When done in a safe environment, it can be a healthy outlet for a person with Alzheimer Disease. However, it is a behaviour that can be worrisome for many caregivers. The following strategies may help caregivers manage the wandering of a person with Alzheimer Disease:

**Secure the living area:** A lock placed where the individual cannot see or reach it, and bells or alarms on certain doors can all assist in creating an environment that is safe for the individual. If wandering happens consistently in reaction to the person's immediate environment, try changing factors such as temperature, lighting, and noise levels.

**Develop meaningful activities:** The individual may be able to participate in doing simple chores or helping with household duties. Consider past skills and interests.

**Exercise:** Regular exercise, outdoor walks, access to your fenced back yard, and visits to the mall can help use up energy and may help the individual sleep more soundly, decreasing the chances of nighttime wandering.

**Remove the triggers:** Removing car keys or items of clothing associated with the outdoors, or disguising doors so that they don't appear to be exits may also help reduce wandering.

**Provide visual cues:** Even in familiar places, a person with Alzheimer Disease can become confused or lost. Familiar objects, furniture, and pictures can provide a sense of comfort and belonging.

**Keep records:** A diary or log may be helpful in understanding the cause of wandering. Keep an ongoing record of wandering episodes, patterns, and cues, noting any ideas you have as to why the incident occurred and how long it lasted.

**Establish community contact:** Let others in your neighbourhood know about the potential of the individual to wander. Ask friends, neighbours, and local businesses to stay alert and call you if they suspect the individual is wandering.

**Register with Safely Home™:** Safely Home™ – Alzheimer Wandering Registry is a nationwide program designed to help find a person with Alzheimer Disease who is lost and assist in their safe

return home. Developed by the Alzheimer Society of Canada in partnership with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, this registry stores vital information confidentially on a police database. The information can be accessed by police anywhere in Canada and the United States. For a one time fee of \$25, the Alzheimer Society provides an identification bracelet, identification cards and a caregiver handbook.

For more information on strategies or to receive a Safely Home™ registration form, contact one of our counsellors at 416-322-6560.

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