
Recommendations

Prevent

- Avoid leaving the person in your care home alone. Use family and professional respite services.
- If the person leaves the home in an angry or agitated state, follow him or her to ensure a safe return.
- Stay close to the person on outings.
- Ask neighbors to notify you immediately if they see the person outside alone.

Prepare

- Register with Safe Return* and keep contact information updated. Ensure that the person is wearing Safe Return jewelry or that his or her clothing is tagged.
- Develop a search plan: identify people who can help you search; identify a person who will remain by the phone during the search; map out search areas for the volunteers.

Search

- **Don't waste valuable time waiting for the person to return.** People with dementia often cannot find their way home even from short distances.
- Call local law enforcement, and then call Safe Return.
- Enact your search plan. First, search residential yards, businesses, and public buildings within 5 miles of the person's last known location. Then concentrate on secluded areas, such as woods and fields, within a mile. Pay particular attention to thickly wooded areas that are close to the sidewalk or street.

***Safe Return** is a program of the National Alzheimer's Association to enable the safe return of persons with dementia who have become lost in the community. Contact your local Alzheimer's Association or Safe Return (888-572-8566) for details.

Developed by Meredith Rowe, RN, PhD,
UF College of Nursing/Institute on Aging
mrowe@ufl.edu

Helping the Lost Become Found

Information for
caregivers about
the problem of
people with
dementia
becoming lost in
the community

For more information
contact your local
Alzheimer's Association
chapter or national office
(800-272-3900).

Dispelling the Myths

Myth

People with dementia will never become lost in the community if their caregivers are caring, competent, and responsible.

Fact

People who live in the best possible caregiving situations become lost in the community.

The majority of incidents involve people who wander away from the home setting. However, people also wander from professional-care settings.

Do not feel ashamed to ask for help if a person in your care becomes lost in the community.

The situations that often lead to a person becoming lost in the community occur in **all** caregiving environments:

- The caregiver is distracted or asleep.
- The person is left alone in the home.

- The person leaves the home or the caregiver in an agitated or argumentative state.
- The person is on an outing with the caregiver and wanders away.
- The person is on a regular outing in the community and becomes confused.

Myth

If the person with dementia does not typically wander, he or she is not likely to become lost in the community.

Fact

Becoming lost in the community is completely **unpredictable** behavior:

- Even people who have never wandered are at risk of becoming confused, leaving a safe situation, and becoming lost in the community.
- All caregivers should be concerned about this potential problem.

Additional Facts

- People with dementia typically wander on foot and are found within 5 miles of their home. However, individuals have also been reported lost who have left in their own cars or on public transportation.
- People who become lost are often found in other people's yards, retail businesses, along streets and highways, and in public buildings like libraries and hospitals. Occasionally they are found in remote areas such as woods or fields.
- Most people with dementia who become lost in the community are safely returned to their caregivers. **However, in some cases, people have become injured or have even died while lost in the community.**