

Emergency preparedness

Emergency situations — such as tornados, hurricanes, heat waves and blizzards — can significantly impact everyone’s safety, but they can be especially upsetting and confusing for individuals living with Alzheimer’s and other dementias. Being prepared is crucial. There are steps and precautions you can take to be as ready as possible. However, if you find yourself in an emergency situation and you haven’t made advance preparations, there are still actions you can take to keep you and the person living with dementia as safe as possible.

Emergency Situation Checklist – Quick Reference

If you need immediate assistance for an emergency situation, dial 911.

Additional considerations when you need to act quickly:

- ✓ Remain calm and focus on your immediate safety and the safety of the person living with dementia. Evaluate whether it is safe to travel from your current location.
- ✓ Keep medication, identification, and important legal and medical documents in a waterproof bag or where they will be readily accessible.
- ✓ Pack your cell phone charger and a couple sets of weather-appropriate clothing.
- ✓ Bring bottled water and non-perishable food items, such as granola bars.
- ✓ Alert others (such as family, friends and medical personnel) if you are changing locations, and ensure they have your contact information.

Be prepared

- Check weather conditions regularly before leaving the house and adjust plans as needed. For example, if a storm is predicted, consider rescheduling appointments that are not urgent.
- If the person with dementia lives in a residential building or attends an adult day center, learn about its disaster and evacuation plans. Find out who is responsible for evacuating everyone in the event of an emergency.
- Be sure the evacuation plan takes special needs into consideration. For example: If a walker or wheelchair is used, how will accommodations be made?
- Provide copies of the person’s medical history, a list of medications, physician information and family contacts to people other than the primary caregiver.
- Prepare an emergency kit (see below for suggestions).

- If oxygen is used, be sure there is easy access to portable tanks.
- Consider enrolling in a wandering response service, such as those offered by the MedicAlert Foundation. Contact the Alzheimer's Association 24/7 Helpline (800.272.3900) or visit alz.org/medicalert for more information.
- Purchase extra medication; keep other supplies well stocked.
- If applicable, make an emergency plan for your pets, including care arrangements in the event you're not home at the time of the emergency.

Create an emergency kit

Consider preparing an emergency kit in a watertight container and store it in an easily accessible location. Be sure to account for your needs (e.g., prescriptions, important documents) as well as the needs of the person living with dementia. Use waterproof bags to protect medications and paperwork and, if possible, store a backup of important documents in a secure electronic file. Items you may wish to include are:

- A couple of easy-to-change outfits appropriate for the weather conditions.
- Medical documents and supplies of medication (carry a list of medications with dosages).
- Velcro shoes/sneakers.
- A cell phone charger.
- A spare pair of eyeglasses, if needed.
- Incontinence products, if needed.
- Extra identification items such as an ID bracelet and clothing tags.
- Copies of legal documents, such as a power of attorney.
- Copies of insurance and Social Security cards.
- Physician's name, address and phone numbers, including cell phone.
- Recent picture of the person living with dementia.
- Hand lotion or other comfort items.
- Bottled water.
- Non-perishable food, including some liquid meals.
- A favorite item (e.g., book, picture, purse) of the person living with dementia.
- Phone numbers for the Alzheimer's Association (800.272.3900) and — if enrolled in the wandering response service — the MedicAlert Foundation (800.625.3780) in the event of a wandering incident.

If you know a disaster is about to occur:

- Move to a safe place.
- If the need to evacuate is likely, do not delay. Try to leave as early as possible to minimize long delays in heavy traffic.

- Alert others — such as family, friends and medical personnel — that you are changing locations and give them your contact information. Update them regularly as you move.

If you are unprepared for a disaster:

- Remain calm and focus on your immediate safety and the safety of the person living with dementia.
- In the event evacuation is necessary, grab the charger for your cell phone before leaving home.
- Take stock of other resources you can gather quickly, such as bottled water, medication and weather-appropriate clothing.

During an evacuation

For a person living with dementia, changes in routine, traveling and new environments may increase the risk for wandering and agitation. Stay alert for unexpected reactions that may result from these changes.

- When appropriate, share the diagnosis with others, such as hotel or shelter staff, family members and airline attendants, so they can better assist.
- Try to stay together or with a group; it only takes a moment to get lost. Do not leave the person living with dementia alone.
- Do your best to remain calm, as this may help reduce anxiety or confusion.

Tips for preventing agitation

Be prepared for the person living with dementia to experience some agitation during an emergency. Consider the following tips:

- Find outlets for anxious energy, such as taking a walk together or engaging in simple tasks.
- Redirect the person's attention if he or she becomes upset.
- Move to a safer or quieter place, if possible. Limit loud noises or excess stimulation.
- Make sure the person is taking medications as scheduled.
- Try to maintain a regular schedule for meals and sleep.
- Avoid elaborate or detailed explanations. Use concrete terms.
- Follow brief explanations with reassurance.
- Be prepared to provide additional assistance with all activities of daily living.
- Pay attention to cues such as fidgeting and pacing, which may indicate that the person is overwhelmed.
- Remind the person that he or she is safe and in the right place.

Helpful hints during an episode of agitation

- Approach the person from the front and use his or her name.
- Find out if pain is a source of agitation.
- Make positive statements using a calm, low-pitched voice.
- Respond to the emotions expressed rather than the words and offer comfort. For example, “You’re frightened and want to go home. It’s OK, I’m here with you.”
- Don’t argue with or correct the person. Instead, affirm his or her experience, reassure and try to divert attention. For example, “The noise in this shelter is frightening. Let’s see if we can find a quieter spot and look at your photo book.”

Take care of yourself

- Consider your own needs and take care of yourself. For instance, remember to hydrate, rest when possible, and pack any medications and other important items.
- Find a good listener to hear your thoughts and feelings.
- Find moments to breathe, meditate and reflect.

Resources

If you need immediate assistance for an emergency situation, dial 911.

Alzheimer’s Association 24/7 Helpline
800.272.3900

MedicAlert® Foundation
800.625.3780
alz.org/medicalert

U.S. Department of Homeland Security
ready.gov
The American Red Cross
redcross.org

The Humane Society of the United States
Make a Disaster Plan for Your Pets
humanesociety.org/issues/animal_rescue/tips/pets-disaster.html

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