

## Emergency preparedness

Emergency situations — such as tornadoes, hurricanes, heat waves, fires and blizzards — can significantly impact safety, especially for individuals with Alzheimer's and dementia, who may find them distressing and confusing. Being prepared is crucial. There are steps and precautions you can take to be as ready as possible. However, if you find yourself in extreme weather or a natural disaster, 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 nonperishable 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 the person living with dementia uses a walker or wheelchair, how will accommodations be made?
- Provide copies of the person's medical history, a list of medications, doctor information and family contacts to people other than the primary caregiver.
- Prepare an emergency kit (read on 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.
- 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 (like prescriptions, important documents, extra cell phone chargers) 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 and/or an external power bank.
- 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.
- Doctor'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.
- Nonperishable food, including some liquid meals.
- A favorite item (like a book, picture, purse) of the person living with dementia.
- Phone number for the Alzheimer's Association (800.272.3900).

### **Extreme heat or cold**

#### **Extreme heat**

Extreme heat can be hazardous for everyone, but it can pose additional challenges for individuals living with Alzheimer's and other dementias.

Alzheimer's disease causes a number of changes in the brain and body that may affect their safety, including changes in sensitivity to temperatures. Taking measures to plan ahead for weather changes, can prevent injuries and help a person living with Alzheimer's and other dementias feel more relaxed and less overwhelmed. Here are some tips to help you prepare:

- **Make a plan.** Prepare and check in on people living with Alzheimer's or dementia during extreme heat. Arrange alternate plans for cooler spaces or move to cooler public places if there's no air conditioning.
- **Dress in light clothing.** If going outside, plan to wear light, breathable fabrics like linen, cotton and jersey to stay cool. Opt for lighter colors, as they absorb less heat. Use a hat and sunscreen for sun protection.
- **Pay attention at night.** Use fans and keep the air conditioning on to keep the person living with dementia cool. At night, low temperatures can still exceed 75 degrees with little fluctuation in humidity levels, causing sleep difficulties and increased agitation.
- **Prepare for behavioral changes.** Heat can increase agitation and confusion. Address physical needs related to the heat and then tend to emotional needs.
- **Increase water intake to stay hydrated.** Watch for signs of dehydration, which may be hard to notice in individuals living with Alzheimer's or other dementias. Common signs of dehydration include a dry, sticky mouth, decreased urination or dark colored urine, unexplained tiredness, and feeling dizzy or lightheaded. People on certain medications may not sweat as much but can still be affected by heat.
- **Stay informed.** Monitor local weather forecasts and be aware of other factors like humidity and air pollution. Regularly check on the person and seek medical attention if symptoms of dehydration, heat exhaustion or heat stroke arise.
  - **Heat stroke** occurs when the body can't control its temperature. Look out for symptoms like a rapid pulse, dry skin, dizziness, and confusion. Call 911 immediately if you suspect heat stroke.
  - **Heat exhaustion** is a milder heat-related illness that can progress to heat stroke. Symptoms include sweating, clammy skin, dizziness and muscle cramps. Move to a cooler place, loosen clothing and provide cool water. Seek medical attention if symptoms persist or worsen.

- **Prevent wandering.** Wandering can be very dangerous during times of extreme heat. It is estimated that 60% of people with dementia will wander and become lost at some point, many do so repeatedly. If not found within 24 hours, up to half of wandering individuals will suffer serious injury or death. Monitor closely for agitation or restlessness, especially during "sundowning" periods.
  - If the person living with dementia does wander and gets lost, begin your search immediately. Start by searching the immediate vicinity, including “less-traveled” areas in your home. Outside of the home, search the yard and nearby surroundings. Most wanderers are found within a half mile of their homes or starting location.
  - **If, after 15 minutes, the person is not located, call 911 to file a missing person’s report.** Ensure a swift response by alerting the police that the individual has Alzheimer’s disease and is a “vulnerable adult.”
  - Many states have implemented “Silver Alerts”, which can be used to inform law enforcement agencies, media outlets and the public about missing older adults, especially those living with dementia.

### Extreme cold

Similar to extreme heat, winter weather conditions — such as freezing temperatures, snow, ice and early darkness — can be dangerous for people living with Alzheimer's or other dementias. However, by planning ahead and taking necessary precautions, caregivers can make a meaningful difference in keeping their loved ones safe. Here are some cold weather tips to consider:

- **Be prepared.** Check weather conditions regularly for winter storms and have emergency plans in place. Tackle to-do lists efficiently in one trip during the cold season and consider rescheduling nonurgent appointments during snowstorms.
- **Bundle up.** Help the person living with Alzheimer's or dementia dress warmly for winter weather by wearing dry, loose-fitting layers and covering exposed skin with clothing, scarves and mittens. Remove layers as necessary for the environment to prevent overheating.
- **Prevent slips.** Assume all surfaces are slippery and assist the person with smaller steps and slower movements. Keep walkways clear and use handrails for added stability.

- **Make daylight last.** Turn on indoor lights earlier, open curtains during daylight hours, and install motion detector lights for safer navigation.
- **Prevent wandering.** Wandering can be extremely dangerous in colder conditions. It is estimated that 60% of people with dementia will wander and become lost at some point, many do so repeatedly. If not found within 24 hours, up to half of wandering individuals will suffer serious injury or death. Monitor closely for agitation or restlessness, especially during "sundowning" periods.
  - If the person living with dementia does wander and gets lost, begin your search immediately. Start by searching the immediate vicinity, including “less-traveled” areas in your home. Outside the home, search the yard and nearby surroundings. Most wanderers are found within a half mile of their homes or starting location.
  - **If, after 15 minutes, the person is not located, call 911 to file a missing person’s report.** Ensure a swift response by alerting the police that the individual has Alzheimer’s disease and is a “vulnerable adult.”
  - Many states have implemented “Silver Alerts”, which can be used to inform law enforcement agencies, media outlets and the public about missing older adults, especially those living with dementia.
- **Buddy up.** Seek support from family members or others for tasks outside the home, such as errands, grocery shopping or snow/ice removal.

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

### **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
- The American Red Cross  
[redcross.org](http://redcross.org)
- U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
[ready.gov](http://ready.gov)
- National Hurricane Center  
[nhc.noaa.gov](http://nhc.noaa.gov)
- The Humane Society of the United States  
Make a Disaster Plan for Your Pets  
[humanesociety.org/issues/animal\\_rescue/tips/pets-disaster.html](http://humanesociety.org/issues/animal_rescue/tips/pets-disaster.html)
- If needed, there are numerous options for a wandering support service, including the MedicAlert Foundation (800-625-3780).

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