

# Locating Devices

Alzheimer *Society*

Day to Day Series

Like all of us, people with dementia have the right to move about as freely and independently as possible. However, due to changes in the brain, a person with dementia can be at risk of getting lost even in familiar places.

A locating device – like a GPS – may be one of the many ways to help a person with dementia live as safely as possible.

## Not just one safety solution but many

Helping a person with dementia live as safely as possible requires a wide range of strategies. If you are considering a locating device as one strategy, here are some important things to consider:

### **Ethical issues: Do you know how the person you are supporting feels about wearing a locating device?**

Some people may think a locating device increases personal freedom and safety while giving caregivers more peace of mind. Others may feel it is an invasion of privacy. When deciding whether to use a locating device, keep in mind the person with dementia's lifelong values and wishes about personal freedom, dignity, independence and safety.

If the person you are supporting with dementia is in the early stages, discuss the possibility of using a locating device in the future.

### **Individual needs: Will the person you are supporting remember to wear the device or have it with them every day?**

Each person with dementia is unique and their abilities will change over time. Similarly, each locating device is unique – there is no one standard device that is appropriate for everyone with dementia. However, to be effective, the person with dementia must wear or have the device with them.

### **Technology cannot replace human care: Are you also considering other strategies to enhance safety?**

No technology is fail proof. For example, locating devices may provide inaccurate readings or not work in certain situations. In addition, although a locating device can alert you that the person with dementia has gone outside, it cannot prevent unsafe situations in the environment like the risk of walking into traffic or on thin ice. Also, locating devices use a range of different technologies. When deciding on a specific locating device it's important to check that the type of technology it uses is appropriate for the unique needs of the person with dementia you are supporting.

## WHAT IS A GPS?

GPS stands for global positioning system. It is a locating device that uses satellite signals to determine locations.

GPS is just one type of locating device. Other locating devices use different technologies.

You may decide that a locating device is not the best approach for the person you are supporting. Other approaches may be more appropriate. For example, low-tech strategies, such as a door alarm that notifies the caregiver when a person with dementia tries to leave the home can be helpful.

If you decide to get a locating device, make sure you have some back up strategies. For example, encourage the person with dementia to wear a MedicAlert® Safely Home® ID. The bracelet is engraved with critical medical information and MedicAlert's 24/7 Emergency Hotline number. When called, MedicAlert notifies family and caregivers of the situation and whereabouts of the individual.

Find out more about **MedicAlert® Safely Home®**: a nationwide service that helps identify the person who is lost and assist them to safely return home.

For more information, please visit [www.medicalert.ca/safelyhome](http://www.medicalert.ca/safelyhome).

## WE'RE HERE TO HELP!

Contact your local Alzheimer Society to learn about how Alzheimer's disease will affect the abilities of the person you are supporting. We'll help you explore a range of strategies that can help the person with dementia live as safely as possible.

[www.alzheimer.ca/helpnearyou](http://www.alzheimer.ca/helpnearyou)

## Choose a locating device based on your specific situation

Like all technology, new locating devices continue to enter the market all the time and may replace current options. No matter which device you consider, it's important to assess that its features are appropriate for the specific needs of the person you are supporting. There is no one standard locating device that is appropriate for every person with dementia in Canada so the Alzheimer Society does not recommend any particular locating device. To decide which device to buy, consider the unique characteristics of the person with dementia you are supporting—and also your unique needs and wants. For example, ask yourself these questions:

### **Will the person with dementia know when and how to use the device?**

For example, some devices require the person with dementia to press a button when they need help. Will the person you are supporting know when they need help? And, will they know to press the button?

### **What level of technology are you comfortable with?**

For example, many locating devices are high-tech with many customizable options. How comfortable are you with figuring out how to use the various features?

### **Where will the locating device be used?**

For example, depending on the technology that the locating device uses, some locating devices are more effective outdoors than others. Do you need the locating device for indoors, outdoors, or both?

**Do you understand the product features of locating devices?**

For example, alarms and Call Centres are some common locating device features. Do you know what these features do so that you can effectively assess options, and use the device properly?

**Who will be responsible for charging the device?**

For example, most locating devices require daily charging by connecting to an electrical outlet for a couple of hours. Who will be responsible for charging the device and then making sure the device is worn by the person with dementia for the day?

**Are there monthly costs?**

For example, besides the initial cost to purchase the device, there is usually monthly fees to keep the device active and operational. Inquire about all monthly and annual fees.

The checklist on the next page provides common locating device features. This will help you learn about these features so you can compare different types of locating devices.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

### **Alzheimer Society Resources:**

A range of resources available to help you learn how dementia affects a person's abilities and determine ways to assist the person to live as safely as possible. Contact your local Alzheimer Society for more information [www.alzheimer.ca/helpnearlyou](http://www.alzheimer.ca/helpnearlyou)

### **MedicAlert® Safely Home®:**

A nationwide service that helps identify the person who is lost and assist them to safely return home. [www.medicalert.ca/safelyhome](http://www.medicalert.ca/safelyhome).

### **Alzheimer Society of Ontario's Finding Your Way® Product**

**Repository:** Information about various locating devices available at [www.findingyourwayontario.ca/locating-technology](http://www.findingyourwayontario.ca/locating-technology)

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## Checklist for Comparing Locating Devices

As you research locating devices, use this checklist to compare product features to decide which device is most appropriate for your specific situation. **There is no one standard locating device that is appropriate for every person with dementia in Canada so the Alzheimer Society does not recommend any particular locating device.**

**Make sure the device is available in Canada because products from other countries may not work in Canada.**

To complete the checklist, review the various device manufacturers' websites or call the manufacturers and ask questions.

Record the following information about each device:

	Product #1 Name:	Product #2 Name:	Product #3 Name:
<b>Costs:</b>			
Cost of the device			
• Activation fee			
• Monthly service cost			
• Cost of any additional technology necessary to use the device like a smart phone, computer or tablet			
<b>Size and Weight:</b>			
• Size			
• Weight			
<b>Battery:</b>			
• Battery life			
• Device range			
• Is the battery rechargeable?			
<b>Device accuracy</b>			
<b>Speed of transmission</b>			

Other questions to consider :	Product #1	Product #2	Product #3
	Check if YES	Check if YES	Check if YES
Is the device available in Canada? <i>If it is from another country, it may not work in Canada.</i>			
Does the device manufacturer have a good reputation? <i>Look for product reviews to assess the credibility of the manufacturer and the quality of the device.</i>			
Does the device have customizable features that you are interested in? <i>For example, some devices allow the caregiver to customize how the device will alert them.</i>			
Will the device be comfortable for the wearer? <i>For example, a large watch may not be comfortable for someone with a small wrist.</i>			
Does the device require additional technology like a smart phone, computer or tablet?			
Is the device water resistant?			
The device is a one-time set up?			
The device is complicated to set up?			
Does the device have fall detection?			
Does the device have tamper detection?			
Does the device have a geo-zone feature? This feature sends the caregiver an alert when the person with dementia leaves or arrives in the area determined by the caregiver.			
Does the device work outdoors?			
Does the device work indoors?			

### Indoor/outdoor technology



**GPS** (global positioning system technology) uses satellite signals to find the location of the person wearing the device. A GPS locating device is most effective outdoors.



**RF** (radio frequency) technology uses radio signals to find the location of the person wearing the device, but at a shorter range than GPS. As a result, although RF locating devices can be used outdoors, they are most effective indoors.

Other questions to consider :

	Product #1	Product #2	Product #3
	Check if YES	Check if YES	Check if YES
Does the device have one-way communication for monitoring?			
Does the device have two-way communication for monitoring?			
 <p><b>One-way communication</b> When the person with dementia needs help, they press a button that automatically connects them to a Call Centre. At the same time, the device automatically sends an alert to their caregiver.</p> <p>Upon receiving the alert, the caregiver cannot communicate directly with the person with dementia. However, the device is programmed to tell the person with dementia to return to a specific location, but the person cannot communicate directly with anyone.</p>	 <p><b>Two-way communication</b> This means that the caregiver, the person with dementia, and the Call Centre can contact each other and communicate directly with each other.</p> <p>For example, the Call Centre can ask the person with dementia if they need help. If there is no response, the Call Centre contacts an emergency responder and keeps the caregiver informed of what's going on. If the person says they don't need help, the Call Centre lets the caregiver know that everything is okay.</p>		

Once you have done the checklist, review it while asking yourself: What would work best for the specific needs of the person you are caring for, as well as what do I need as their caregiver?

## We're here to help!

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# Alzheimer Society



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