

TRAVELLING

Travelling with a person who has dementia can present a number of challenges and potential hazards. Planning ahead is critical. Travel is usually easier in the early stages of the illness. In the more advanced stages, it could be a traumatic experience for both of you, as the person may become disoriented, agitated, confused, or distressed. It is important to keep in mind that people with dementia tend to function at a lower level when faced with change or stress.

Although people with dementia do best in well-structured and familiar settings, travelling can be successful given the right conditions and some careful planning.

Warning signs that overnight travel will be challenging:

- Consistent disorientation and agitation in unfamiliar settings
- Person becomes teary, anxious, or withdrawn in crowded, noisy settings
- Person wants to go home when away from home on short visits
- Delusional, aggressive, obsessive, fearful, or uninhibited behaviour
- Incontinence problems
- Wandering behaviour

Travelling tips:

- If you are planning a long trip, consider taking a shorter trip ahead of time as a trial run. This will give you a good idea of the challenges you might face and whether the longer trip will be possible.
- Make sure you have a contingency plan. You can cut short the holiday if the travelling turns out to be distressing for either of you.

- Be prepared to do everything for two. This can be taxing, so try to get plenty of rest before the trip.
- Provide time for rest and naps. You will both need it.
- If you are going to visit friends or family, warn them in advance of possible situations that may arise. Advise them that you will need their help. Be specific when telling them how they can be helpful. One way they can help is to spend some time with the person with dementia so that you can have some time for yourself.
- Talk to your physician about your travel plans. He/she may have some ideas about medication that could help the person to better cope with travelling.
- If you can, consider bringing along a companion—someone familiar to the person with dementia. This is a helpful way to share the responsibilities.
- Avoid travelling during peak season when crowds will be bigger and wait-times longer.
- Allow plenty of time to investigate the best travel/medical insurance policy for your situation.
- Build in flexibility for stopovers. This will enable the person to adjust gradually to time differences.
- If you feel it is appropriate, notify the airline that someone with dementia will be flying with them. Most airlines will be very accommodating.
- If necessary, ask for assistance from flight staff when the person needs to use the lavatory.

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Page 2 of 5

- Request seats close to the lavatory. This can help to avoid long walks along narrow aisles.
- Consider requesting a window seat to limit over-stimulation from other passengers and crew.
- Make sure the person has activities to occupy them during a long trip.
- Carry snacks with you for both the person with dementia and yourself.
- Take a change of clothes for the person on the plane, in the car, and on all excursions.
- Check that the person is comfortable in their seat, especially when travelling for long distances.
- Take frequent breaks and travel only during the day.
- Be aware of safety when getting out of cars, especially when parking near traffic.
- Do not drive alone with a person who is agitated. The safety of everyone using the roads could be at risk.
- Choose clothing that is easy for the person to put on and take off.
- Bring familiar items, such as a CD of favourite music, photographs, or a favourite sweater.
- Choose familiar restaurants whenever possible, such as franchise restaurants.
- Hold on to all-important possessions such as passports, money, schedules, tickets, a list of important contacts, a list of current

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Page 3 of 5

medications, and a copy of your Representation Agreement, if you have one.

- Remember to take enough prescription and non-prescription medication to cover the period of travel. Also, bring medication for at least one extra day, just in case things get delayed.
- Have an emergency plan in case the person with dementia, or yourself, requires medical assistance.
- Consider bringing a card that reads: “The person with me has dementia. Please be patient...” This will help to alert hotel and restaurant staff, airline personnel, and others of your situation.
- Carry a recent photograph of the person with dementia.
- If you will be staying in a hotel and wandering is a problem, lock the door to the room with the safety latch. You can also use a childproof doorknob or a portable door alarm.
- Survey the hotel room for possible safety hazards.
- Leave the bathroom light on all night. Bring electrical or battery operated night-lights.
- Cover sliding glass doors with large stickers or other items, to prevent the person from walking into the glass.
- Unfamiliar taps and knobs can be very confusing for a person with dementia. Make sure you turn the shower on and adjust the water temperature as necessary.
- Allow plenty of time for everything.

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Page 4 of 5

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Page 5 of 5