

Travel tips



We all enjoy a change of scenery and a break from our regular routine; however, dementia-related changes in abilities can make getting away more challenging. This handout shares travel tips for people living with dementia and their

caregivers that may help a trip run more smoothly. We also share activities you can enjoy close to home when travelling long distances is no longer possible.

TRAVEL TIPS FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH DEMENTIA

With adequate support and the right adjustments, people living with dementia can stay engaged in everyday life and enjoy activities like travelling. Whether you are travelling a short distance or taking a vacation further away, careful planning is important to ensure your comfort and safety. The following suggestions may help to minimize travel-related stress:

PLAN AHEAD: Work with your family members and friends to help plan your trip. If you have a travel agent, make sure they are aware of your needs. If you are planning to visit friends and family, tell them about the changes you have experienced since your last visit and offer suggestions for how they can be supportive.

SIMPLIFY: When you travel, it can be helpful to make as few changes in your daily routine as you reasonably can. For example, choosing a destination that isn't many time zones away can help you keep to your regular routine. Also, consider avoiding travel at peak times when crowds are larger and wait times are longer.

TAKE TIME TO REST: Although exciting, travelling and sightseeing can also be very tiring. Be sure to build in time for rest and naps; you and your travel companion may both need it!

Source: Alzheimer Society of Canada and U.S. National Institute on Aging

PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA SHARE THEIR TRAVEL TIPS

We asked people living with dementia from around the province to share their travel tips.

TRAVELLING WITH SOMEONE

- “Know where your care partner is at all times.”
- “Don’t travel alone, bring along family or friends.”

PACKING

- “Have your care partner pack with you.”
- “Travel light.”
- “Don’t forget your passport!”

AT THE AIRPORT

- “Get help from the airport; ride the cart to the gate.”
- “Ask the airline to board the airplane early.”
- “Ask for a wheelchair – then you don’t need to walk long distances.”

WHILE TRAVELLING

- “Keep it simple! Don’t over-schedule.”
- “Write down what you want to see and don’t plan to see too many sites.”
- “Carry an ‘I have dementia’ card with you.”
- “Bring along a notebook to record your memories along with your photos; it will help bring back your adventures when you get home.”
- “Bring something for quiet moments – like an adult colouring book.”



ENJOYING SUMMER ACTIVITIES CLOSE TO HOME

There may come a point when travelling is no longer the best option for both the person living with dementia and their caregiver. However, staying close to home for the summer can still be fun. Below we share a few enjoyable activities you may wish to try for your “stay-cation.”

HAVE FAMILY AND FRIENDS VISIT YOU: If you are no longer travelling long distances, consider having family and friends come to see you. During their visit, you can play tour guide for the day and show them your favourite hometown sites, restaurants and shops. If it has been some time since you have last seen your visitors, consider telling them about the changes you or the person you are caring for have experienced.

PLANT A GARDEN: Adding flowers or vegetables to your garden can be relaxing and fun. As the summer months pass by, you can look forward to seeing the garden change as the plants bloom and grow. In addition to admiring the beauty of your garden, you will need to provide it with care and attention, which can be a meaningful daily activity for you to enjoy. (Source: MAREP Newsletter Spring 2016)

GO THE BEACH: You don’t need to travel to an exotic location to enjoy a day at the beach. Beautiful British Columbia boasts wonderful ocean and freshwater beaches, so be ready to pack your beach umbrella, towel and sunscreen.

PLAN A PICNIC IN THE PARK: Do you have a favourite park you like to visit? Next time you go, consider packing a picnic basket with some tasty summertime snacks. The park is also a perfect place to engage in some light activities like throwing a Frisbee, kicking a ball or going for a walk. If you are up to it, invite family and friends to join you.



We asked people living with dementia to share some of their favourite local travel destinations. Here is what they had to say:

“The west arm of Kootenay Lake.”

“Shuswap – we entertain a lot!”

“The sea wall in Vancouver.”

“The Lynn Valley suspension bridge, it’s free!”

“Deer Lake Park in Burnaby.”

“Harrison Hot Springs.”

TRAVEL TIPS FOR CAREGIVERS

Travelling with a person who has dementia can present a number of challenges and safety concerns. Travel is usually easier in the early stages of the illness and can become more difficult as the disease progresses. It is important to keep in mind that when faced with change or stress, a person living with dementia may not function as well and can become disoriented, confused and distressed.

Some warning signs that overnight travel will be challenging are:

- Consistent disorientation and agitation in unfamiliar settings.
- Reactions to crowds or noise.
- Problems with incontinence.
- Desire to go home when away for a short time.
- Wandering behaviour.
- Frequent uninhibited and/or responsive behaviours.
- Frequent delusions and/or hallucinations.



Although people living with dementia may do best in a well-structured and familiar setting, travelling can be successful given the right conditions and some thorough planning. Here are some tips that may help your trip go more smoothly.

PLAN AHEAD

- Talk to the person's physician about your travel plans.
- Include the person with dementia in your planning and give them a copy of the trip itinerary for reference.
- Allow plenty of time to investigate the best travel and/or medical insurance policy for your situation.
- Learn as much as you can about the place you'll be visiting so you can anticipate what you both will need.
- Ensure emergency health services are available if needed. Have an emergency plan in case you or the person with dementia requires medical assistance.
- Have a contingency plan in the event you need to cut the holiday short if the travelling turns out to be distressing for either of you.
- 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.

WHAT TO BRING

- It can help to have activities to occupy the person living with dementia during a long trip. A recording of favourite music, photographs or an adult colouring book can help pass the time.
- Write down and bring a list of emergency contacts.
- Remember to take enough medication to cover the period of travel. Bring medication for at least one extra day, just in case things get delayed.
- 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.
- Bring digital and photocopies of medical information and legal documents, such as a list of current medications and your Representation Agreement, if you have one.
- Carry a recent photograph of the person with dementia; have a digital copy available too.

ASK FOR HELP

- If you can, consider bringing along a companion who is familiar to the person living with dementia. This is a helpful way to share the responsibilities.
- If you feel it is appropriate, notify the airline that someone with dementia will be flying with them. You may want to request early boarding or transportation to and from the gate.
- If you are staying at a hotel, let the staff know about your needs and explain some of the possible difficulties you might encounter.



CALL THE FIRST LINK® DEMENTIA HELPLINE

A confidential province-wide support and information service for anyone with questions about dementia, including people living with dementia, their caregivers, friends, family, professionals and the general public.

- Phone 1-800-936-6033
Lower Mainland: 604-681-8651
Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- Email supportline@alzheimerbc.org

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