

Tips for travelling with someone who has dementia

Travelling with a person with dementia requires thought and advanced planning. Care partners should make sure they are prepared to travel with a person with dementia, as they may need to manage unexpected events and new or challenging behaviours, sometimes in public. Travelling may be challenging and stressful for the care partner, so it is important to maintain realistic expectations about the vacation.

Dementia changes

Individuals with dementia may have difficulty adjusting to new environments, new people, and changes in routine. For this reason, it is usually easier to travel in the early stages of the disease, as the person is less likely to become disoriented, agitated or distressed. As the disease progresses, a person who requires assistance with bathing, dressing, and toileting will probably have significant problems travelling. Travel may not be a good idea if the person with dementia is:

- Consistently disoriented, confused, or agitated (even in familiar setting)
- Wanting to go home when away from home on short visits
- Delusional, paranoid, or disinhibited
- Teary or anxious in crowded, noisy settings
- Wandering
- Physically or verbally aggressive
- Medically unstable

What to try

- Try a “trial run” by taking a short trip using the same type of transportation to see if the person with dementia tolerates it well. If you plan to stay in a motel/hotel while away, book a room close to home a several weeks beforehand to see how it goes.

- Try to travel to familiar, stable and well-ordered settings. Try to make the trip there as short as possible (book direct flights when available, etc.)
- Consult your doctor before travelling and ensure you have an adequate supply of all medications to bring with you
- Have the person with dementia carry identification, important phone numbers, name and location of hotel, and a list of medical conditions in case they wander or get lost. Consider having the person wear an identification bracelet.
- Take copies of important documents and information with you, including identification, emergency contact info, doctor’s names and contact info, list of medications and dosages, list of allergies, insurance information, recent photographs and copies of legal papers (living will, advanced directives, power of attorney, etc.)
- Inform the travel agent, airlines, and hotel staff ahead of time of any special needs the person with dementia may have so they are prepared to assist them. Always ask for assistance and use services designated for people with disabilities if available.
- Allow plenty of time for everything, and take regular rest breaks to ensure that all basic needs are met (toileting, hydration, nutrition)
- Make sure the person with dementia is wearing comfortable shoes and clothing
- Include the person with dementia in your trip planning, and give them a copy of your itinerary so they know what to expect
- When planning your trip, make sure to build flexibility into your plans to give the person with dementia time to adjust and rest as needed. Try to keep their daily routine as close to normal as possible. Think ahead about activities that may need to be adjusted. For example, the person with

dementia may function better at certain times of the day, or may need some quiet time after a social activity, or one that's physically taxing.

- If you're planning to visit friends and family, tell them about any changes since your last visit.

Car Travel

Transportation in a car or other vehicle should ensure both the safety and emotional comfort of the person with dementia. Someone with dementia may have difficulty getting in and out of a car. As the dementia progresses, perceptual problems may develop, often making it difficult for the person to recognize differing depths. As confusion increases, the person might lose the ability to follow the steps it takes to get in and out of a car. The following steps may make car travel easier for both the person with dementia and their care partner:

- Do not drive alone with a person who is agitated. The safety of everyone in the vehicle and other people using the road may be at risk.
- Park your vehicle on a flat surface, a fair distance from the curb, leaving enough room for the person to step onto the street and to be able to turn to sit.
- Move the front seat back as far as possible so there is lots of room to move. The front seat of the car is often more accessible than the rear seats.
- Buckle up.
- If the person attempts to remove the seatbelt while driving, you could look into the purchase of a seat-belt buckle guard.
- Use child safety locks on the doors.

Further information on this topic

- Some of the information contained in this fact sheet was excerpted from *Traveling with someone with dementia*
<http://lightbridgehealthcare.com>
- *Travelling and going on holiday* fact sheet
<http://www.alzheimers.org.uk/factsheets>
- *Caring for someone with dementia 08: Travelling* fightdementia.org.au/about-dementia-and-memory-loss/help-sheets

Visit the following websites:

- www.alzheimerniagara.ca