

Alzheimer Society

PETERBOROUGH, KAWARTHA LAKES, NORTHUMBERLAND & HALIBURTON

To Vacation or Not to Vacation?

By: Bonnie Fitzgerald, Client Support Coordinator



It is that time of year again and questions arise about traveling with a person living with dementia. You know your family member better than anyone else, and the following questions and suggestions may help you decide whether you should go on a trip or plan your vacation.

Things to think about before planning your travel destination:

- Does the person living with dementia really want to go to see a particular person or place? What are their limitations?
- Is the caregiver rested enough to take on additional challenges such as unexpected behaviours being in an unfamiliar place?
- Will you be able to maintain daily routines and schedule as much as possible?
- Will there be adequate rest periods to give the person living with dementia, time to tolerate the environmental changes and the caregiver time to decompress?



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Safety Considerations:

- Does the person living with dementia have a medical alert/safety home bracelet, GPS system or cell phone in case you get separated? Be sure they carry current identification and you also have a recent photograph of the person living with dementia. Let family and friends know your planned itinerary.
- Is someone else going to assist you with supporting the person living with dementia?
- Do you have travel and health insurance?
- Will you have enough medication to get you through your trip?
- How will you travel by car, airplane, bus or train?

A person living with dementia should not travel if they are experiencing severe disorientation and agitation when visiting unfamiliar places. If you have noticed they can have delusional, paranoid and aggressive behaviours as well as wandering behaviours you may want to reconsider planning your trip with the person living with dementia.

The answers to these questions may help you decide whether planning a vacation is appropriate for your family member. Be honest with yourself. Who really needs and would benefit from the vacation? Traveling can be a very pleasurable and adventurous time for both of you. If you decide you are going to go, then plan as best as you can. Consider staying in smaller hotels which are quieter and easier to navigate. Reserve a room with plenty of walking space with a small kitchenette so you can chose to cook a meal if you are too tired to go out. Try keeping your travel plans as simple as possible. Stay flexible, keep a sense of humour and have the ability to be creative when the unexpected occurs. It will help create wonderful memories and special moments.



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If you are traveling by car, plan to stop every two hours to give yourselves time rest and use the washroom. Consider bringing an extra set of clothes in case of a spill or toileting accident occurs. I would also suggest stopping earlier in the day to allow the person living with dementia time to adjust to their environmental surroundings.

If you are planning to travel by plane, bus or train take the shortest route to your destination. You may want to consider booking a seat that keeps interactions to a minimum as well as trying to limit your time in the gate areas. Bring snacks or activities for the person living with dementia because you may need them as a distractor.

I hope you are able to continuing to travel and enjoy the things you love to do together as long as it works for both of you.

Happy travels!

Bonnie Fitzgerald
Client Support Coordinator



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