

Alzheimer Society

Anyone who has dementia and is able to walk is at risk of going missing.

In fact, statistics show that three out of five people with dementia will go missing at some point.

But the reality is that people with dementia don't "wander." Most of the time, they are acting with purpose: they get up in the middle of the night and their brain tells them it's time to go to work. Or they go for a walk and suddenly their neighbourhood looks unfamiliar and they can't find their way home.

There are different kinds of wandering. Active wandering includes pacing, searching for something or attempting to keep busy. Passive wandering occurs when the person seems to pace aimlessly and is easily distracted.

Possible triggers/causes:

- Stress and anxiety
- Inability to recognize people, places or objects
- Desire to fulfill former obligations
- Boredom
- Searching for something familiar
- Need to find the bathroom, a special person or a lost object

Strategies:

- Encourage movement and exercise to reduce anxiety.
- Maintain regular routines.
- Remove visual reminders (coat, purse, hat) from sight.
- Involve him in productive activities.
- Help her connect with familiar items and objects (photos, personal items).
- Reassure where he is.
- Accommodate wandering. It may be the last independent skill she has.



Example: It's 3:00 am and you hear what sounds like your front door closing. You head down to check and catch a glimpse of your father heading down the driveway with his pajamas on and little else. It is the middle of winter and you live near a busy intersection.

Don't: Give your father a sleeping pill before bed.

Do: Address triggers and ask questions about:

- Why he might be engaging in this behaviour (e.g. has he been talking about visiting or seeing someone in particular? Did he used to get up early in the morning?).
- Make the environment less encouraging to wandering (e.g. put bolts on the doors, put slippers and house coat out of immediate sight) and shut the door.
- Ensure your father engages in light exercise throughout the day to increase the need for rest at night.