

# staying safe

Steps to take for a  
person with dementia



# make safety a priority before it's a problem

Safety is important for everyone, but the need for a comprehensive safety plan is particularly important for a person with Alzheimer's as the disease progresses.

Alzheimer's disease causes a number of changes in the brain and body that may affect safety. Depending on the stage of the disease, these can include:

- **Judgment:** forgetting how to use household appliances.
- **Sense of time and place:** getting lost on one's own street.
- **Behavior:** becoming easily confused, suspicious or fearful.
- **Physical ability:** having trouble with balance.
- **Senses:** experiencing changes in vision, hearing, sensitivity to temperature or depth perception.

Taking measures to improve safety can prevent injuries and help a person with dementia feel more relaxed, less overwhelmed and maintain his or her independence longer.



Visit [alz.org/safety](https://alz.org/safety) for a comprehensive offering of safety information, tips and resources.

## The Alzheimer's Association offers helpful information for keeping a person with dementia safe.

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# 1. safety at home

Depending on the stage of the disease, provided that safety measures are in place, an individual with dementia can live in the comfort of his or her own home or a caregiver's home.

As the disease progresses, the person's abilities will change. But, with some creativity, flexibility and problem solving, it's not difficult to adapt the home to support these changes.

## Evaluate your environment

A person with dementia may be at risk in certain areas of the home or outdoors. Pay special attention to garages, work rooms, basements and outside areas.



## Beware of dangerous objects and substances

Even the most basic appliance or household object can become dangerous. Take precautions to help ensure these items do not become safety hazards.

- Use appliances that have an auto shut-off feature. Keep them away from water sources (e.g., kitchen and bathroom sinks).
- Install a hidden gas valve or circuit breaker on the stove so a person with dementia cannot turn it on. Or, consider removing the knobs from the burners.
- Store grills, lawn mowers, power tools, knives and cleaning products in a secure place.
- Discard toxic plants and decorative fruits that may be mistaken for real food.
- Remove vitamins, prescription drugs, sugar substitutes and seasonings from the kitchen table and counters. Medications should be kept in a locked area at all times.
- Supervise the use of tobacco and alcohol. Both may have harmful side effects and may interact dangerously with some medications.

## Firearm safety

If you have a firearm in the house, there are special precautions you will need to take:

- Keep firearms in a locked cabinet, firearm vault, safe or storage case, or remove them from the living space.
- Lock ammunition in a separate place.
- Exercise full control and supervision.
- Keep firearms unloaded when not in use.
- Ask for help from local law enforcement if you are unfamiliar with firearm safety or if you choose to discard the weapon.





### **Avoid injury during daily activities**

Most accidents in the home occur during daily activities such as eating, bathing and using the restroom. Take special precautions at these times.

- Check the temperature of water and food — it may be difficult to tell the difference between hot and cold.
- Install walk-in showers and grab bars in the shower or tub and at the edge of the vanity to allow for independent, safe movement.
- Add textured stickers to slippery surfaces. Apply adhesives to keep throw rugs and carpeting in place, or remove rugs completely.

**Most accidents in the home occur during daily activities such as eating, bathing and using the restroom.**

### **Adapt to vision limitations**

Dementia sometimes makes it difficult for a person to decipher between colors and understand what he or she sees because of changes in vision.

- Changes in levels of light can be disorienting. Create an even level of lighting by adding extra lights in entries, outside landings, and areas between rooms, stairways and bathrooms.
- Use night lights in hallways, bedrooms and bathrooms.

### **Important documents to keep on hand**

There are several important documents that should be accessible in case of an emergency.

- Doctors' names and contact information.
- A list of current medications and dosages.
- Phone numbers and addresses of local police and fire departments, hospitals and poison control.
- A list of food or drug allergies.
- Copies of legal papers (e.g., living will, advance directives, power of attorney).
- Names and contact information of friends and family members to call in case of an emergency.
- Insurance information (e.g., policy number, member name).

Keep copies of these documents in an easily accessible location at home and take them with you when you are traveling or plan to be away for an extended period of time. Keep an additional copy of each in another location away from home.



## 2. wandering and getting lost

A person with dementia is at risk for wandering and becoming lost; many do so repeatedly. In fact, more than 60 percent of those with dementia will wander. If not found within 24 hours, up to half of wandering individuals will suffer serious injury or death. It's important to be aware of the risk factors for wandering.

### Signs of wandering behavior

A person may be at risk for wandering if he or she:

- Comes back from a regular walk or drive later than usual.
- Tries to fulfill former obligations, such as going to work.
- Tries or wants to “go home,” even when at home.
- Is restless, paces or makes repetitive movements.
- Has a hard time locating familiar places like the bathroom, bedroom or dining room.
- Acts as if doing a hobby or chore, but nothing gets done (e.g., moves around pots and dirt without actually planting anything).
- Acts nervous or anxious in crowded areas, such as shopping malls or restaurants.

### Tips to reduce wandering

If you live with or care for a person with dementia, here are a few tips to help reduce the risk of wandering:

- Provide opportunities for the person to engage in structured, meaningful activities throughout the day.
- Make sure the person gets enough exercise, which can help reduce anxiety, agitation and restlessness.
- Place deadbolts either high or low on exterior doors.
- Ensure all basic needs are met (e.g., toileting, nutrition, thirst).
- Carry out daily activities, such as folding laundry or preparing dinner.
- Reassure the person if he or she feels lost, abandoned or disoriented.
- Control access to car keys (a person with dementia may not just wander by foot).
- Avoid busy places that are confusing and can cause disorientation, such as shopping malls.
- Do not leave someone with dementia unsupervised in new surroundings.

Visit [alz.org/safety](https://www.alz.org/safety) to learn about helpful services such as MedicAlert® + Alzheimer's Association Safe Return®, which assists in the return of those who wander, and Alzheimer's Association Comfort Zone®, powered by Omnilink, which monitors a person's location.

### 3. driving

Driving demands good judgment, quick reaction time and split-second decision making. Because of the progressive nature of Alzheimer's, a person with the disease will eventually become unable to drive.

It is helpful to have a conversation early on about how independence can be maintained when he or she can no longer drive. Putting a plan in place to address driving can help ease the transition.

Signs that it may be time to stop driving:

- Forgetting how to locate familiar places.
- Failing to observe traffic signals.
- Making slow or poor decisions.
- Driving at inappropriate speeds.
- Becoming angry and confused while driving.
- Hitting curbs.
- Using poor lane control.
- Making errors at intersections.
- Confusing the brake and gas pedals.
- Returning from a routine drive later than usual.

#### Visit the Alzheimer's Association Dementia and Driving Resource Center at [alz.org/driving](http://alz.org/driving) for:

- Video scenarios showing four different families discussing driving and dementia.
- Tips and strategies for planning ahead and handling resistance.
- Common signs of unsafe driving.
- Resources for alternative methods of transportation.
- Additional information on driving and safety.

Losing the independence driving provides can be upsetting. If the person with dementia insists on driving, caregivers, friends or family members may need to take extra steps, including:

- Encourage law enforcement to issue a citation.
- Ask a doctor to write a "do-not-drive" prescription.
- Control access to the car keys.
- Disable the car by removing the distributor cap or battery.
- Keep the car out of sight; seeing the car may act as a visual cue to drive.
- Have the person tested by the Department of Motor Vehicles.

The screenshot shows the Alzheimer's Association website's "Dementia and Driving Resource Center". The header includes the Alzheimer's Association logo and contact information (24/7 Helpline: 800.272.3900). The main content area features a video titled "Supportive Conversation" showing a family discussion. Below the video, there is a section titled "Having the conversation" which includes a list of bullet points for starting the conversation. The website is designed with a purple and white color scheme.

**alzheimer's association**  
Our vision is a world without Alzheimer's  
Find us anywhere: ZIP  GO Search by state

Home > We Can Help > Safety Center > Driving

### Dementia and Driving Resource Center

Driving demands quick reaction time and fast decision making – because of this, a person with Alzheimer's will eventually become unable to drive. Ideally, families should talk openly about driving soon after a diagnosis of Alzheimer's. Making decisions about when it is time to stop driving can be difficult, but dealing with the issue early on can help ease the transition.

**Watch how four families deal with different issues related to dementia and driving.**

**Supportive Conversation**  
by adnash

A Supportive Conversation: Frank has early stage Alzheimer's and the doctor said it's no longer safe for him to drive. His wife doesn't drive, but knows it's time to discuss finding alternative transportation. [Full Screen](#)

**Read more:**

- > [Having the conversation](#)
- > [Planning ahead](#)
- > [Signs of unsafe driving](#)
- > [Resources](#)

**Having the conversation**

Losing the independence driving provides can be upsetting. It is important to acknowledge a person's feelings and preserve his or her independence, while ensuring the person's safety and the safety of others.

**Starting the conversation**

- Initiate a dialogue to express your concerns. Stress the positive and offer alternatives.
- Address resistance while reaffirming your unconditional love and support.
- Appeal to the person's sense of responsibility.
- Reinforce medical diagnoses and directives. Ask the physician to write a letter stating that the person must not drive. Or ask the physician to write a prescription that says, "No driving." You can then use the letter or prescription to reinforce the conversation.
- Consider an evaluation by an objective third party.
- Understand that this may be the first of many conversations about driving.

*The Dementia and Driving Resource Center is a product of a cooperative agreement between the Alzheimer's Association and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA).*

## 4. tips for safe travel

Living with dementia does not mean that it's necessary to stop traveling; it just requires careful planning. To ensure a safe and enjoyable trip, remember to:

- Pack copies of important documents (see page 6), medication, travel itinerary, comfortable change of clothes, water, snacks and activities.
- Stick with the familiar. Travel to known destinations that involve as few changes in daily routine as possible.
- If you will be staying in a hotel, inform the staff ahead of time of your specific needs so they can be prepared to assist you.
- Travel during the time of day that is best for the person with dementia.
- Contact the Alzheimer's Association to find the nearest Association office that can provide assistance at your travel destination.

A change in environment can trigger wandering behavior. Enroll in MedicAlert®+ Alzheimer's Association Safe Return®. If you are already enrolled, notify the program of travel plans.

### Air travel

Moving through airports requires plenty of focus and attention. At times, the level of activity can be distracting, overwhelming or difficult to understand. Here are a few things to keep in mind for air travel:

- Inform the airline and airport medical service department of your needs ahead of time to make sure they can help you.
- Remind airport employees and in-flight crew members of your needs.
- Even if walking is not difficult, consider requesting a wheelchair so that an airport employee is assigned to help you get from place to place.







## 5. disaster preparedness

Disaster situations, such as a hurricane or forest fire, can significantly impact everyone's safety, but they can be especially upsetting and confusing for individuals with dementia. Being prepared for an emergency is crucial. Put together an emergency kit in a watertight container, and store it in an easily accessible location.

This kit should include:

- Copies of important documents (see page 6).
- Several sets of extra clothing.
- Extra medication.
- Incontinence products.
- Identification items, such as a MedicAlert® + Alzheimer's Association Safe Return® ID bracelet.
- A recent picture of the person with dementia.
- Bottled water.
- Favorite items or foods.

If an emergency occurs and you need to evacuate, make sure your plans are compatible with specific needs. For example, if the person with dementia uses a walker or wheelchair, be sure your emergency plan takes this into consideration.

If an individual lives in a residential facility, learn about its disaster and evacuation plans. Find out who is responsible for evacuating the person in the event of an emergency.

Staying safe becomes increasingly important as Alzheimer's progresses. With appropriate planning and accommodation, you can ensure that everyone is as safe as possible.



Being prepared in case of an emergency is crucial.





## **alz.org/safety**

The Alzheimer's Association Safety Center offers information and resources, including:

- MedicAlert® + Alzheimer's Association Safe Return®.
- Alzheimer's Association Comfort Zone®, powered by Omnilink.
- Dementia and Driving Resource Center.



## **alz.org/care**

The Alzheimer's and Dementia Caregiver Center provides information and resources, including:

- Alzheimer's Navigator™ — create customized action plans.
- Community Resource Finder — find local resources.
- ALZConnected™ — connect with other caregivers.



## **800.272.3900**

Alzheimer's Association 24/7 Helpline — available 365 days.

# alzheimer's association®

The Alzheimer's Association is the world's leading voluntary health organization in Alzheimer's care, support and research. Our mission is to eliminate Alzheimer's disease through the advancement of research; to provide and enhance care and support for all affected; and to reduce the risk of dementia through the promotion of brain health.

**Our vision is a world without Alzheimer's®.**

**800.272.3900 | alz.org**

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