



SAFETY FOR ALZHEIMERS PATIENTS

Alzheimer's disease can be devastating for the sufferer and for their loved ones. Besides the stress (emotional) of the diagnosis for both the patient and family, there is the added worry for the safety (physical) of the patient as the disease progresses.

What causes Alzheimer disease?

Generally speaking, Alzheimer's is a brain disease caused by lesions that destroy the cells in the brain. As the nerve cells die off, the affected area of the brain withers and shrinks. Usually the area of the brain responsible for memory, logical thought and personality is where the disease strikes.

What are the symptoms?

Some indicators that the individual may be in the beginning stages of Alzheimer's disease include: loss of recent memory, problems with judgment, calculation or language, depression, anxiety, development of unusual behavioural quirks, personality changes, delusions and trouble keeping track of date, time and place.

Keeping your loved one feeling safe reduces their stress and therefore helps calm the patient.

Here are some tips to help ensure the safety of loved ones still residing independently:

At Home

- Prevention is the best course of action. Look at the home with new eyes and assess the environment to identify and decrease hazards. "Child-proofing" the home works for Alzheimer's patients as well. If it can harm a child it can harm an Alzheimer sufferer.
- Keep emergency numbers and the home address close to the phone.

Also, use an answering machine, as Alzheimer's sufferers may find taking messages difficult or become the victim of phone scams.

- Keep the doors of your home locked as well as the windows to prevent the patient from wandering away unsupervised or consider using loose fitting door knob covers (use the when the caregiver is present as they present safety issues in case an emergency exit is needed). Also, consider locating locks either higher or lower than the standard height, making them more difficult to locate.
- Remove locks from bedroom and bathroom doors as the patient may lock themselves in and forget how to unlock the door.
- Add locks to medicine cabinets and latches on kitchen cabinets.
- Restrict and monitor internet and e-mail usage.
- Consider an alarm system or baby monitor.
- All firearms should be removed from the home. While this may be difficult if the person was once a sportsman, safety is paramount.
- Hide a key to the home in case the patient locks you out.
- Try to anticipate and address reasons the patient may get up a night ahead of time (hungry, thirsty etc.).
- To prevent wandering try placing black floor mats in front of doors leading outside (you can also try painting black squares in these areas). The colour black causes the individual to believe there are holes in front of doors.
- Using comfy chairs such as recliners and bean bag chairs, restricts movement as they are difficult to get out of. This can help with wandering as well.
- Exercise.

Outside The Home

- Make short trips and stay together.
- While in a vehicle keep seatbelts on and doors locked.

- Don't leave an Alzheimer's patient alone in a vehicle even for a minute. They may wander away.
- Take the car keys away. This is difficult as it signals the end of independence, but is imperative not only for the safety of your loved one but the safety of everyone on the road. The patient's physician can assist with this decision.

In Case Of Wandering

- Consider a medical I.D. bracelet with "memory loss" and an emergency contact telephone number inscribed.
- Build a local network if you don't reside in the area in which your loved one resides. Make the neighbours aware of the patient's condition in case of wandering. Have them contact the caregiver or police if they suspect the patient is alone and on the move.
- Make police aware of contacts, behaviours and physical descriptions for the patient. This makes it easier to track patients, family and caregivers down in cases of wandering.
- Keep copies of current photos.
- Check within a one mile radius of where the individual was last seen. Include open water, treed areas, stairwells, balconies etc. in your search.
- Areas within 100M of roads.
- Favorite spots.
- First direct the search in the direction of the individuals dominant hand.