



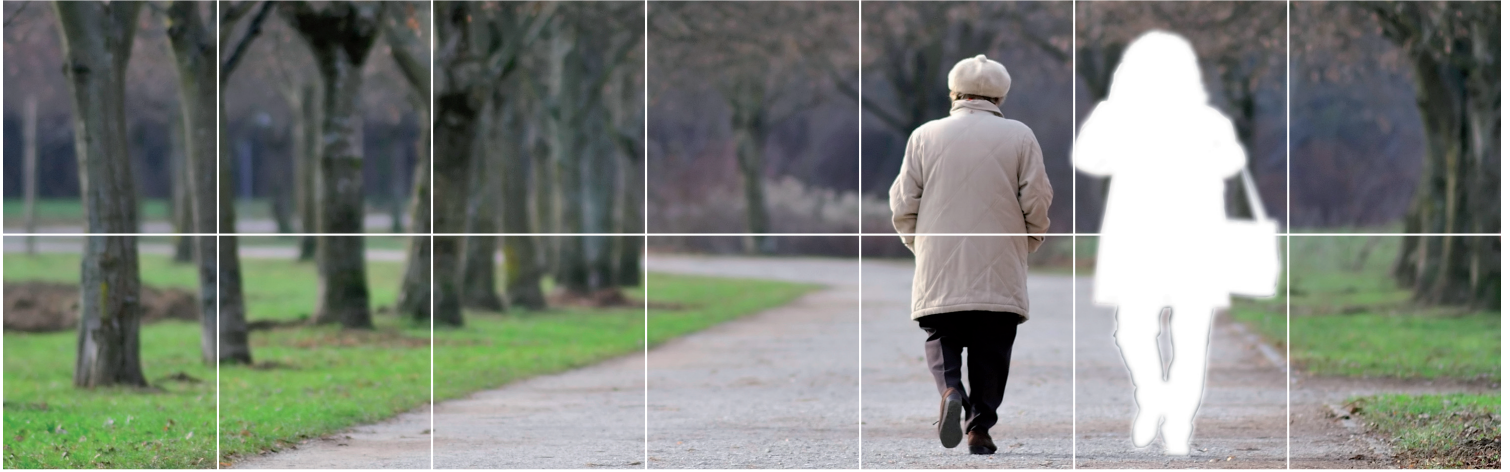
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AUSTRALIAN FEDERAL POLICE

A person's failing memory may make it impossible
to remember or explain how to get home

NATIONAL MISSING PERSONS COORDINATION CENTRE

FACT SHEET



▶ Missing persons and dementia: safer walking

Wandering is quite common among people with dementia. The person's failing memory and declining ability to communicate may make it impossible for them to remember or explain the reason they wandered or how to get home.

What can carers try

Precautions can be taken to try and prevent a person with dementia from going missing including:

- A physical check-up will help identify whether illness, pain or discomfort has triggered wandering.
- Discuss the side effects of medication with the doctor. Try to avoid medication which may increase confusion and cause drowsiness and possibly incontinence.
- Ensure that the person carries some form of

identification in case they do get lost. An identity bracelet with name, address and telephone number can be very helpful when a person who is missing is found. It may also be helpful to sew a name tag into garments the person wears. If possible, register their details with a 'safe return program'. Identification cards are also available through Alzheimer's Australia.

- Some people find it helpful to keep a record or diary so they can see if there is a pattern to the wandering behaviour. It may occur at certain times of the day or in response to certain situations which can then be more carefully controlled.
- Try to reduce the number of objects in sight which may act as a reminder to the person to wander. Bags, coats, mail for posting and work clothing may encourage wandering.

- Consider bells and buzzers which sound when external doors are opened.
- Make part of the garden secure so that it becomes a safe place to walk around.
- Tell neighbours and local shopkeepers.

Safer walking

Safer walking means that a person can walk independently, is steady on their feet and has no history of falling. Safer walking is being aware of where you are, where you are going and how to get home again.

This is called orientation to place. The ability to do this is a complex cognitive skill called *wayfinding*. Leaving home alone is not necessarily problematic for people with dementia if the person can find their way back.

The ability to recognise one's own home, roads and take notice of, and obey, signs and other cues to safely cross roads is also important. It is important for safer walking to know how long it takes to walk between important landmarks such as home and the shops, and to recognise what is passed on the way.

Things you can do to reduce the risk of unsafe walking

There are several things you can do to reduce the risk of a person with dementia going missing, if they leave home unaccompanied.

- Help maintain physical conditions for safer walking. Ensure comfortable footwear is worn at all times. Improving stability with good footwear will help lower the risk of falling, tripping and injury.
- Prepare for rapid identification of the person with dementia should it be required. Ensure there are recent photographs.

Discreetly label personal belongings. Enlist the person in a safe return program through Alzheimer's Australia in your State or purchase a MedicAlert bracelet, or a bracelet that is difficult to remove, and have it engraved with identification details.

- Promote discrete family and community awareness.
- Know the familiar routes and destinations usually chosen by the person.
- Alert the police if necessary by filing a missing persons report at your local police station.
- Consider using locator technology to help monitor a person with dementia who wants to walk alone.

Safe return programs

Some States/ Territories have programs designed to return a missing person with dementia home safely, providing quick and accurate identification.

Some safe return programs provide a personalised stainless steel bracelet,

designed to be worn by the person with dementia. The bracelet features a toll free telephone number and personal identification number linked to the State police's 'Safely Home' database. The database is accessible by Police 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It provides a detailed description of the person with dementia, a photo, contact information, previous residential addresses and locations the person may visit. All details on the database are confidential.

When someone finds the missing person they can simply look at the bracelet, phone the police and quote the identification number. The police then make arrangements for the person to be returned home safely.

Carers can also use safe return programs to instigate a search for a missing person with dementia by contacting their local police.

Dementia content provided by Alzheimer's Australia.

For more information

National Missing Persons Coordination Centre

The NMPCC, Australian Federal Police, provides a national leadership and coordination approach to the Australian Government's response to missing persons. Its mission is to reduce the incidence and impact of missing persons.

The NMPCC works within the PLEASE policy principles of Prevention, Location, Education, Awareness, Support and Evaluation.

Find out more by visiting our website.

Alzheimer's Australia

Alzheimer's Australia is the national peak body for people living with dementia, their families and carers. It provides leadership in policy and services.

National Dementia Hotline:
1800 100 500
www.alzheimers.org.au