

alzheimer's  association®
Midlands Chapter

Summer Safety Tips



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Summer Safety Tips

The pleasures of summer include longer, warmer and sunnier days, celebrations with family and friends, and backyard BBQs. For the person caring for a loved one with Alzheimer's disease, summer can also bring with it additional safety challenges. By taking a few minutes to review the following safety tips, families can enjoy a fulfilling and pleasant summertime together.

Sunshine and Warm Weather

- Exposure to the Sun – Limit your loved one's exposure to the sun. Place comfortable lawn chairs in shaded areas. Encourage her to stay indoors between 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. when the sun's rays are the strongest. Encourage your loved one to wear a hat and sunglasses to protect her eyes.
- Sunscreen – Remind your loved one with Alzheimer's disease to apply and reapply sunscreen when outside for long periods of time. Spray-on sunscreens are now available and may make application quicker and easier.
- Hydration – During the summer heat it is especially important to drink lots of fluids. Offer the person with Alzheimer's disease a small glass of water to drink hourly, or keep a cool glass of water within arm's reach as a reminder to him to drink. Provide non-alcoholic beer or lemonade for backyard BBQs.
- Appropriate Clothing – As the summer season is getting underway, think about reorganizing your loved one's closet. Put away winter clothes and replace them with light clothing appropriate for the season.
- Enroll in or if necessary, update information with the Medic Alert® + Alzheimer's Association® Safe Return®. Extreme summer temperatures can put your loved one at greater risk should she wander and become lost.



Summer Fun

- Noise and crowds of people can cause a person with Alzheimer's disease to become agitated or wander in search of a quiet place. Fireworks displays, parades and picnics in the park on holidays may overwhelm your loved one. Consider watching fireworks from your home or in the quiet of the car and parades on television; picnic during less crowded hours and days.
- Backyard BBQ's and fireworks can create a fire and safety hazard for your loved one with Alzheimer's disease who does not remember the proper use for such items. Never allow unsupervised access to open flames and hot surfaces.
- Attending a minor or major league ballgame may be something your loved one has always enjoyed. However, large crowds can be overwhelming for the person with Alzheimer's disease. Identify someone in your group to be the designated "buddy" so you don't lose track of who was supposed to stay with your loved one. Make sure someone always accompanies your loved one to the restroom and the concession stand and stays with them until they are ready to return to their seat. In large crowds the risk of being separated is great and can happen very quickly.
- Swimming may be a favorite pastime for your loved one with Alzheimer's disease. While the physical exercise should be encouraged, do not allow an individual with Alzheimer's disease to swim unsupervised, and do not leave children in the pool under the supervision of the person with Alzheimer's disease even for a short period of time.
- Bicycling can be an enjoyable way to exercise in the summer, but traffic and other external stimuli can cause a person with Alzheimer's disease to become distracted, resulting in an accident. If your loved one still enjoys bicycling, consider accompanying him on the ride or ask a trusted companion to accompany him. Encourage your loved one to wear a helmet and to ride on trails designated for pedestrians and cyclists.
- Gardening can be a pleasurable and relaxing activity but can also pose risks for the person with Alzheimer's disease. Keep an eye on sharp gardening shears or tools and closely monitor their use. Use fertilizers that are not harmful if swallowed accidentally and ensure that the plants in the garden are not poisonous.
- Family reunions can be overwhelming to the person with Alzheimer's disease and may rely greatly on her ability to recall names and faces. Consider limiting the amount of visitors and prepare both family members and the person with Alzheimer's disease in advanced for the visit. Have a back up plan that will allow for a quiet place of rest if things become overwhelming or confusing.
- Many families plan vacations and trips during the summer time. Remember that new and unfamiliar places can be confusing for the person with Alzheimer's disease. Consider simplifying travel plans or traveling to a familiar destination. Alert the Medic Alert[®] + Safe Return[®] registration line of your travel plans and provide them with contact information for your destination.



Summer Tips for Visiting Relatives with Dementia

When visiting relatives this summer, remember that Alzheimer's disease can have a big impact on every member of the family including children. Each child will react differently to someone who has Alzheimer's.

The young people in your life might have questions about what is happening. It's important for you to take the time to answer these questions openly and honestly. It will also help to share with them the changes the disease might bring, now and in the future.

The Alzheimer's Association® Midlands Chapter can help you answer questions and provide information about how the family can work through the changes brought on by the disease. Here are some tips for helping children and teens understand Alzheimer's disease:

- Keep lines of communication open
- Answer questions honestly
- Teach your child about the disease, the symptoms and the stages
- Let your child know these feelings are normal
- Create opportunities for your child to express his or her feelings
- Prepare your child for changes
- Let your child know reactions of the person with the disease are not his or her fault
- Inform your child's teacher and school counselor

Activities children can share with the person who suffers from dementia:

- Bake cookies
- Put a puzzle together
- Play Hangman
- Color or draw pictures
- Make a scrapbook of family photographs
- Read a favorite book or story
- Eat a picnic lunch outside
- Watch your favorite TV show together
- Listen to or sing old songs



Travel Tips

Having dementia does not mean that it's necessary to stop participating in meaningful activities such as travel; it just requires careful planning to ensure safety, comfort and enjoyment for everyone.

Tips for Safe Traveling

- Changes to environment can trigger wandering behavior. Be sure to enroll in MedicAlert® + Alzheimer's Association® Safe Return®, our 24-hour nationwide emergency response service for individuals with Alzheimer's or related dementia that wander or who have a medical emergency.
- Stick with the familiar. Travel to known destinations that involve as few changes in daily routine as possible. Try to visit places that were familiar before the onset of dementia.
- Evaluate options for the best mode of travel. Based on needs, abilities, safety and preferences, decide what would provide the most comfort and the least anxiety.
- Avoid elaborate sightseeing trips or complicated tours, which may cause anxiety and confusion.
- 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 example, if the late afternoon increases agitation, avoid traveling at this time.
- Remember to pack necessary medications, up-to-date medical information, a list of emergency contacts and photocopies of important legal documents.
- Allow plenty of time for rest. Don't over-schedule.
- Avoid very loud restaurants and places with a lot of people if the person is overly tired.
- Learn if there are services available at your destination by contacting your local Alzheimer's Association®.
- Have a bag of essentials with you at all times that include medications, your travel itinerary, a comfortable change of clothes, water, snacks and activities.



Special Considerations for Air Travel

Airports are full of things that will require attention. At times, so much activity can be distracting, overwhelming or difficult to understand.

If you're traveling by plane:

- Avoid scheduling flights that require tight connections. Ask about airport escort services that can help you get from place to place.
- Inform the airline and airport medical service department ahead of time of your specific needs to ensure they can be prepared to assist you. When requesting assistance, most airlines ask for at least 48 hours advance notice.
- Do not hesitate to 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 in the airport.



General Traveling Tips

Traveling long distances with a person in the early stage of dementia may still be quite enjoyable. As dementia advances, however, traveling becomes unpredictable as the person becomes more confused. Plan ahead for a trip by gathering important documents: insurance cards, passports, your physician's phone number, refills on medications and a copy of medical records in case the person with dementia needs to see a physician while away. Make sure you keep track of all the documents and medications. Packing them in carry-on bags so they will not get lost in route is a good idea. Remember to bring sufficient funds or a credit card with you in case you must change your plans suddenly and return home. Also, you may want to bring along a brief letter from your physician to the airline or hotel to expedite a change in plans.

When traveling, try to follow the routine that is followed at home. Even minor changes in routine can be distressing to your loved one, and may cause unexpected delays in the delivery of care. So, be sure to allow plenty of time for everything. Plan for rest periods throughout the day. For example, if you are taking a tour by bus, you may want to remain in the bus so the person can take a nap instead of visiting all the sights.

Remember the person who is at risk of wandering when at home, may also do so in an unfamiliar place. If this is the case with your loved one, try using an identity bracelet or necklace that clearly explains that she has a dementia illness. Put a card with the name and address of the hotel where you are staying in the person's pocket. You may want to carry a recent photo of the person in case she gets lost.

Traveling may also make the person more anxious. Bring along an anti-anxiety medicine just in case. Toileting is an issue that requires some forethought when you are traveling. If you are driving, stop at the rest-area toilets every couple of hours. If the person needs assistance in the bathroom and you may be in there for a while, bring along an "OCCUPIED" sign for the washroom door. Have on hand a full change of clothing. Be sure to keep the way to the toilet well lighted in hotel rooms, and keep a light turned at night in the bathroom.