

Emergency preparedness

Emergency situations, such as tornados, hurricanes, heat waves and blizzards, can significantly impact everyone's safety, but they can be especially upsetting and confusing for individuals with Alzheimer's and other dementias in any stage of the disease. Being prepared is crucial. There are steps and precautions you can take to be as ready as possible.

Advance preparations

- If the person with dementia lives in a residential building or attends an adult day center, learn about its disaster and evacuation plans. Find out who is responsible for evacuating everyone in the event of an emergency.
- Be sure the evacuation plan takes special needs into consideration. For example, if a walker or wheelchair is used, how will accommodations be made?
- Provide copies of the person's medical history, a list of medications, physician information and family contacts to people other than a partner/spouse.
- Prepare an emergency kit (see below for suggestions).
- If oxygen is used, be sure there is easy access to portable tanks.
- Enroll in MedicAlert® + Alzheimer's Association Safe Return®, a 24-hour nationwide emergency response service for people with dementia and their caregivers.
- Purchase extra medication; keep other supplies well stocked.

Emergency kit

Consider preparing an emergency kit in a watertight container and store it in an easily accessible location. Use waterproof bags to protect medications and documents. Items you may wish to include are:

- Easy on/off clothes (a couple of sets).
- Supplies of medication (or, at least, a list of medications with dosages).
- Velcro shoes/sneakers.
- A spare pair of eyeglasses.
- Incontinence products, if needed.
- Extra identification items such as an ID bracelet and clothing tags.
- Copies of legal documents, such as a power of attorney.
- Copies of medical documents that indicate the disease and current medications.
- Copies of insurance and Social Security cards.
- Physician's name, address and phone numbers, including cell phone.
- Recent picture of the person with dementia.
- Hand lotion or other comfort items.
- Bottled water.
- Favorite items or foods, including some liquid meals.

- The person with the disease's favorite item (book, picture, purse).
- Phone numbers for the Alzheimer's Association (800.272.3900) and MedicAlert + Safe Return (800.625.3780).

If you know a disaster is about to occur:

- Move to a safe place.
- If the need to evacuate is likely, do not delay. Try to leave as early as possible to minimize long delays in heavy traffic.
- Alert others (such as family, friends and medical personnel) that you are changing locations, and give them your contact information. Update them regularly as you move.

During an evacuation

Even in the early stage of Alzheimer's, changes in routine, traveling and new environments may increase the risk for wandering and agitation. Stay alert for unexpected reactions that may result from these changes.

- When appropriate, share the diagnosis with others, such as hotel or shelter staff, family members and airline attendants, so they can better assist.
- Try to stay together or with a group; it only takes a moment to get lost. Do not leave the person with dementia alone.
- Do your best to remain calm, as this may help establish a positive tone.

Tips for preventing agitation

Be prepared for the person with dementia to experience some anxiety or confusion during an emergency. The following tips may help prevent agitation:

- Find outlets for anxious energy, such as taking a walk together or engaging in simple tasks.
- Redirect the person's attention if he or she becomes upset.
- Move to a safer or quieter place, if possible. Limit stimulation.
- Make sure the person is taking medications as scheduled.
- Try to schedule regular meals and maintain the usual sleep schedule.
- Avoid elaborate or detailed explanations. Use concrete terms.
- Follow brief explanations with reassurance.
- Be prepared to provide additional assistance with all activities of daily living.
- Pay attention to cues such as fidgeting and pacing, which may indicate that the person is overwhelmed.
- Remind the person that he or she is in the right place.

Helpful hints during an episode of agitation

- Approach the person from the front and use his or her name.
- Use calm, positive statements and a patient, low-pitched voice.
- Respond to the emotions expressed rather than the words. For example, "You're frightened and want to go home. It's OK, I'm here with you."

- Don't argue with or correct the person. Instead, affirm his or her experience, reassure and try to divert attention. For example, "The noise in this shelter is frightening. Let's see if we can find a quieter spot and look at your photo book."

Take care of yourself

- Find a good listener to hear your thoughts and feelings.
- Find moments to breathe, meditate and reflect.

Resources

MedicAlert® + Alzheimer's Association Safe Return®
888.572.8566
alz.org/safety

U.S. Department of Homeland Security
ready.gov

The American Red Cross
redcross.org

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