

Traveling

Living with Alzheimer's disease or another dementia does not mean it's necessary to stop participating in meaningful activities such as travel. However, it does require planning to ensure safety, comfort and enjoyment for everyone.

For all travel, regardless of distance or duration, it's important to take into account the specific needs, abilities and preferences of everyone involved. For example, if you have always gone to Florida in the winter, you can continue the tradition until the trip becomes too difficult or is no longer relaxing for the person with dementia or the caregiver.

Tips for a calm traveling experience:

- Plan ahead.
- Learn to recognize the warning signs of anxiety and agitation and identify strategies to reduce them. Discuss this plan with the person with dementia.
- Try not to overload the person with a lot of directions or too much information.

General travel considerations:

- Environmental changes can trigger wandering or confusion. Enroll in MedicAlert® + Alzheimer's Association Safe Return®, a 24-hour nationwide emergency response service for individuals with dementia who wander or have a medical emergency. Call 888.572.8566 or visit alz.org/safety to enroll. Those already enrolled should notify MedicAlert + Safe Return of travel plans.
- It may be helpful to stick with the familiar. Travel to known destinations that involve as few changes in daily routine as possible.
- 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.
- When selecting destinations, consider those that have easy access to emergency health services and pharmacies.
- Consider everyone's needs and desires as you plan your trip; elaborate sightseeing trips or complicated tours may cause anxiety and confusion.
- If you will be staying in a hotel, consider informing the staff ahead of time of your specific needs so they can be prepared to assist you.
- Have a backup plan in case your trip needs to change unexpectedly. This may mean purchasing travel insurance if you have booked flights or hotels.
- Carry with you an itinerary that includes details about each destination. Give copies to family members or friends you will be visiting or to emergency contacts at home.

- Travel during the time of day that is best for the person. For example, if he or she becomes tired or more agitated in the late afternoon, avoid traveling at this time.
- Have a bag of essentials with you at all times that includes medications, your travel itinerary, a comfortable change of clothes, water, snacks and activities.
- 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.
- Contact the Alzheimer's Association to learn if services are available at your destination.

What to keep in mind for visits to family and friends:

Prepare friends or family members for the visit by explaining dementia and any changes it has caused. Go over any special needs and explain that the visit could be short or that you may need to change activities on short notice. Some additional considerations:

- It may be helpful to stay as close to your normal routine as possible. For example, keep meal and bed times on a similar schedule to that followed at home. Eating in may be a better choice than at a crowded restaurant.
- Be realistic about abilities and limitations. Allow extra time when scheduling activities.

Suggestions for air travel:

Moving through an airport requires focus and attention, as the level of activity can be distracting, overwhelming and difficult to understand. Consider the following for air travel:

- Make your reservation through a travel agency or by calling the airline directly. Doing so allows you to add notes or instructions to the reservation for special needs such as wheelchair assistance or in-flight meals.
- Avoid scheduling flights that require tight connections.
- If traveling through an unfamiliar airport, review a map of the facility to plan for distance between connecting flights, locations where security re-entry may be required and locate convenient locations such as restrooms.
- If walking is difficult, consider requesting a wheelchair or motorized cart so that an airport employee is assigned to help you get from place to place. Most airlines ask for at least 48 hours of notice.
- Even if the passenger does not require support for mobility, consider requesting wheelchair assistance to help with navigation through security checkpoints. This support may help expedite the process and reduce stress.
- Contact the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) at least 72 hours prior to travel for information about what to expect during the security screening. While at the airport, ask what to expect and inform the TSA agent at the security checkpoint about the dementia diagnosis.

- Do not hesitate to ask for assistance from airport employees and in-flight crew.
- If the person needs help using the restroom, look for companion care bathrooms so you can more easily assist.
- Stay with your travel companion at all times.

Traveling alone with dementia.

Some individuals in the early stage of Alzheimer's who remain independent may be able to travel alone, but planning ahead is necessary. Consider the following:

- When booking flights, inquire if the airline offers a “meet-and-greet” service to escort passengers through security and to their gate terminal. This service may also be used to help passengers transfer between connecting flights.
- Inquire about any other services that would offer companion support to meet the safety needs of the passenger.
- Include all emergency contacts on the airline reservation.
- Contact TSA to determine if a pass can be issued to family members or friends to escort the passenger through security to their gate terminal.
- Make sure that all travel documents and identification are readily accessible. It may be helpful for the person to wear a document holder.

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