

EMERGENCY SITUATIONS AND PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA

Emergency situations can significantly impact safety, especially for individuals with Alzheimer's and dementia, who may experience distress and confusion. There are actions you can take to keep you and the person living with dementia as safe as possible.

Tips for responding to disasters:

- Remain calm and focus on your immediate safety and the safety of the person living with dementia.
- If evacuation is necessary, grab your cell phone charger before leaving home.
- Take stock of other resources you can gather quickly, such as bottled water, Medication, portable oxygen tanks (if applicable), and weather-appropriate clothing.
- If you need immediate assistance for an emergency situation, dial or text 911.

During an evacuation:

- For a person living with dementia, 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 living with dementia alone.
- Do your best to remain calm, as this may help reduce anxiety or confusion.

Tips for preventing agitation:

- Be prepared for the person living with dementia to experience some agitation during an emergency. Consider the following tips:
- 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 loud noises or excess stimulation.
- Make sure the person is taking medications as scheduled.
- Try to maintain a regular schedule for meals and sleep.
- 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 safe and in the right place.

Helpful hints during an episode of agitation:

- Approach the person from the front and use his or her name.
- Find out if pain is a source of agitation.
- Make positive statements using a calm, low-pitched voice.
- Respond to the emotions expressed rather than the words and offer comfort.
- 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

- Consider your own needs and take care of yourself. For instance, remember to hydrate, rest when possible, and pack any medications and other important items.
- Find a good listener to hear your thoughts and feelings.
- Find moments to breathe, meditate and reflect.

If you need immediate assistance for an emergency situation, dial or text 911.

Alzheimer’s Association 24/7 Helpline 800.272.3900 or visit alz.org/help-support/caregiving/safety/in-a-disaster

The American Red Cross [redcross.org](https://www.redcross.org)

U.S. Department of Homeland Security [ready.gov](https://www.ready.gov)

National Hurricane Center [nhc.noaa.gov](https://www.nhc.noaa.gov)

The Humane Society of the United States [humanesociety.org/issues/animal_rescue/tips/pets-disaster.html](https://www.humanesociety.org/issues/animal_rescue/tips/pets-disaster.html)

If needed, there are numerous options for a wandering support service, including the MedicAlert Foundation (800-625-3780).

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