

## Miami Valley Chapter

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### Alzheimer's Wandering Behaviors Especially Dangerous During the Winter Months

**DAYTON**, OH—Dec. 1, 2021—Wandering behavior in individuals living with Alzheimer's is fairly common. In fact, six in 10 individuals with the disease wander at least once and many do so repeatedly. During the cold months of winter, this behavior puts this vulnerable population at greater risk.

"Although common, wandering can be dangerous, even life-threatening, especially during the winter season," said Rebecca Hall, program director for the Alzheimer's Association Miami Valley Chapter. "This behavior risk causes stress that weighs heavily on caregivers and families."

"Hypothermia and frostbite are real dangers for those who wander off and get lost in winter. Even in 50-degree temperatures, too much core and limb heat can be lost, and in freezing temperatures that body heat is lost rapidly," Hall said.

Families and individuals of loved ones living with Alzheimer's can take advantage of the extensive suggestions and planning resources provided on the Alzheimer's Association Miami Valley Chapter website at [www.alz.org/dayton](http://www.alz.org/dayton) in the help and support sections.

Hall continued, "Alzheimer's disease causes people to lose their ability to recognize familiar places and faces, and it's common for a person living with dementia to wander or become lost or confused about their location, even in the early stages of the disease."

Suggestions from the website include:

#### Watch for signs of wandering

Everyone living with Alzheimer's or another dementia is at risk for wandering behavior. Common signs a person may be at risk of wandering include:

- Returning from a regular walk or drive later than usual.
- Forgetting how to get to familiar places.
- Talking about fulfilling former obligations, such as going to work.
- Trying or wanting to "go home" even when at home.

#### Reduce wandering risks

The following tips may help reduce some of the risks of wandering:

- Identify the time of day the person is most likely to wander (for those who experience "sundowning," this may start in the early evening.) Plan activities and exercises to do during this time to help reduce anxiety, agitation and restlessness.

- Consider reducing (not eliminating) liquids up to two hours before bedtime to reduce waking and getting up to use the bathroom during the night.
- Reassure the person if he or she feels lost, abandoned or disoriented.

### **Safeguard the home**

As the disease progresses and the risk for wandering increases, assess your individual situation to see which of the safety measures below may work best to help prevent wandering:

- Install warning bells above doors or use a monitoring device that signals when a door is opened.
- Place a pressure-sensitive mat in front of the door or at the person's bedside to alert you to movement.
- Use safety gates or brightly colored netting to prevent access to stairs or the outdoors.

"Families that are caring for loved ones living with Alzheimer's should consider enrolling in a MedicAlert membership plan with wandering support," Hall said. "This plan helps first responders and families reconnect with individuals living with dementia who experience a medical emergency or wander." Information about this nationwide, 24/7 emergency wandering response service can be obtained by contacting the Alzheimer's Association 24/7 Helpline at 800.272.3900. The Helpline can also assist with plan enrollment.

### **Plan ahead for emergencies**

Families should create a plan of action if a loved one goes missing:

- Ask neighbors, friends and family to call if they see the person wandering, lost or dressed inappropriately.
- Keep a recent, close-up photo of the person on hand to give to police or searchers.
- Create a list of places the person might wander to, such as past jobs, former homes, places of worship or a favorite restaurant.

### **Take immediate action when wandering occurs**

- When looking for a lost person, consider whether the individual is right- or left-handed. Wandering patterns generally follow the direction of the dominant hand.
- Begin by looking in the surrounding vicinity — many individuals who wander are found within 1.5 miles of where they disappeared.
- If the person is not found within 15 minutes, call 911 to file a missing person's report. Inform the authorities that the person has dementia.

The Alzheimer's Association Helpline is available 24/7 at 800.272.3900. Individuals can also find complete safety resources at [www.alz.org/safety](http://www.alz.org/safety).

### **About the Alzheimer's Association®**

The Alzheimer's Association is a worldwide voluntary health organization dedicated to Alzheimer's care, support and research. Our mission is to lead the way to end Alzheimer's and all other dementia — by accelerating global research, driving risk reduction and early detection, and maximizing quality care and support. Our vision is a world without Alzheimer's and all other dementia®. Visit [alz.org](http://alz.org) or call 800.272.3900.

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