

Caregiver Tip Sheet: Participating in Community Activities/Programs

Participating in activities outside the home—whether it be going to a movie, out to lunch, or attending a community event—can be good for people with memory loss. In order for things to go smoothly, though, the caregiver needs to do some planning in advance and be prepared for the person with memory loss to need extra support during the activity.

Even if the person with memory loss is very independent at home, you should assume he/she will need extra help at an event somewhere outside the home.

Some general considerations:

- Can the person with memory loss actually participate in or enjoy the activity?
- Will the number of people, the pace of the activity, the type of activity, or the amount of noise cause the individual to feel over-stimulated or anxious?
- Is the time of day good for the individual with memory loss? Consider the possibility of sundowning or agitation during certain times of day.
- Have you tried to cram too many activities into one day? People with memory loss tire much more easily and are more affected by tiredness. Be sure to allow time to rest and avoid the temptation to cram several activities into one day.
- Is the person with memory loss carrying his/her cell phone? Does he/she have emergency contact information in wallet/purse? (Enrolling in MedicAlert + Alzheimer's Association Safe Return is recommended—for more information call 800.272.3900).
- Do you have the energy and time for the activity? Being a caregiver at an activity takes a lot more energy than doing something alone or with a companion who doesn't have memory loss. Consider bringing someone else along to help you.

A note about participating in Alzheimer's Association sponsored events:

When participating in an Alzheimer's Association event, it's expected the caregiver will be responsible for the safety and well-being of the person with memory loss.

If you are attending a conference with multiple breakout sessions, we ask that the caregiver and the person with memory loss stick together. Please do NOT attend separate breakouts unless the person with memory loss is attending a session where supervision is provided. Another option would be to split up, but make sure the person with memory loss has a "buddy" who will be responsible for him/her while you attend separate breakouts.

If you are leaving the person with memory loss at a program or workshop where supervision is provided, be sure to:

- leave your own contact information in case of emergency
- keep your cell phone with you and put it on vibrate if you'll be somewhere where you need to turn off the ringer
- make sure your family member/friend is "settled in" before you leave
- arrive promptly to pick him/her up at the end of the program

Attending the activity with the person with memory loss:

- Notice if the person with memory loss is becoming anxious during the activity. Some signs of anxiety are: fidgeting, muttering, sighing, looking around anxiously, worrying, trouble concentrating, or irritability. If you notice these signs, you may want to consider giving your companion a break from the activity. Sometimes a walk in the hallway or lobby, stepping outside for some fresh air, or just giving the person with memory loss a chance to move around will help.
- It's easy for a person with memory loss to get separated from you and/or to get lost in an unfamiliar place. If the individual needs to leave the activity for some reason, it's best if you or someone else go with him/her, even if you have to make up an excuse to do so. Don't assume just because he/she hasn't gotten lost before that it won't happen in an unfamiliar place.
- Restrooms are places where people with memory loss and their family/friends often get separated. If you're of the same sex, it's best to use the restroom together and ask the person with memory loss if he/she will wait for you. If of the opposite sex, when your family/friend uses the restroom, it's best to wait where you have a good view of the restroom door. Be sure to watch for your companion to come out, because it's easy for him/her to take a wrong turn when exiting the restroom. If he/she is taking an unusual amount of time, it's a good idea to send someone of the same sex in to check on him/her. If a family restroom is available, it can be used by people of both sexes.
- If you need to use the restroom, don't assume the person with memory loss will remember to wait somewhere for you. It's better to ask someone if they'll sit/stand with him/her while you use the restroom.
- Sometimes people with memory loss behave in socially inappropriate ways during activities. This happens because of the disease and is nothing to be angry about or ashamed of, although it can be awkward. If the behavior isn't disruptive, feel free to stay. If it is disruptive, it may be best to leave the activity. The Alzheimer's Association provides wallet cards that caregivers can use to discreetly inform others of why the person you're with may behave in unexpected ways.
- You may need to gently remind your loved one to speak in a low voice if another person is addressing the group.
- If you notice the person with memory loss is not participating, try encouraging him/her.

If the Person with memory loss is participating in an activity without you:

- If the person with memory loss gets anxious without you, it is not in his/her best interest to attend alone. Consider joining or having another caregiver attend with the individual.
- Does the mood of person with memory loss indicate that he/she will want to participate on the day of the program? If not, you might consider attending future activities instead.