

Disaster Preparedness

Advance preparations

- If your loved one lives in a residential facility, find out about its disaster and evacuation plans. Ask if you will be responsible for evacuating your loved one.
- Whether your loved one lives with you, or you are a long-distance caregiver, make sure evacuation plans include his or her specific needs. Check your local Alzheimer's Association and other organizations that provide services for the elderly to see if help is available.
- Prepare an emergency kit (see below for suggestions).
- Alzheimer's Association Safe Return® is an identification and support program that provides assistance for a person with Alzheimer's who wander and become lost, either locally or far from home.
- Enroll in Safe Return by phone, online or by mail. Call toll-free at 1.888.572.8566, or visit www.alz.org/safereturn/.
- If you are already registered in Safe Return, make sure your information is updated.

If you know a pending disaster is about to occur:

- Get yourself and the person with Alzheimer's 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 (family, friends, medical personnel) that you are changing locations, and give them your contact information. Contact them regularly as you move.
- Be sure there are people other than the primary caregiver who have copies of the person with dementia's medical history, medications, physician information and family contacts.
- Purchase extra medications.
- If your loved one uses oxygen, be sure to obtain portable tanks.

Emergency kit

Consider preparing an emergency kit in advance. Keep it in a watertight container and store it in an easily accessible location. Your emergency kit might include:

- Easy on/off clothes (a couple of sets).
- Supplies of medication (or minimally, a list of medications with dosages).
- Velcro shoes/sneakers.
- A spare pair of eyeglasses.
- Incontinence products.
- Extra identification items for the person, 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 individual's condition and current medications.
- Copies of insurance and Social Security cards.
- Use waterproof bags to hold medications and documents.
- Physician's name, address and phone numbers (including cell phone).

- Recent picture of the person with dementia.
- Hand lotion or other items to promote comfort.
- Bottled water.
- Favorite items or foods. Liquid meals.
- Pillow, toy or something else to hug.
- Alzheimer's Association and Safe Return phone numbers.

Get more information on disaster preparedness from the [National Hurricane Center](#).

During an evacuation

People with dementia are especially vulnerable to chaos and emotional trauma. They have a limited ability to understand what is happening, and they may forget what they have been told about the disaster. Be alert to potential reactions that may result from changes in routine, traveling or new environments.

- When appropriate, inform others (hotel or shelter staff, family members, airline attendants) that your loved one has dementia and may not understand what is happening.
- Do not leave the person alone. It only takes a few minutes to wander away and get lost.
- Changes in routine, traveling and new environments can cause:
 - Agitation
 - Wandering
 - Increase in behavioral symptoms, including hallucinations, delusions and sleep disturbance.
- Do your best to remain calm. The person with dementia will respond to the emotional tone you set.

Tips for preventing agitation

Reassure the person. Hold hands or put your arm on his or her shoulder. Say things are going to be fine.

- Find outlets for anxious energy. Take a walk together or engage the person in simple tasks.
- Redirect the person's attention if he or she becomes upset.
- Move the person to a safer or quieter place, if possible. Limit stimulation.
- Make sure the person takes medications as scheduled.
- Try to schedule regular meals and maintain a regular sleep schedule.
- Avoid elaborate or detailed explanations. Provide information using concrete terms. Follow brief explanations with reassurance.
- Be prepared to provide additional assistance with all activities of daily living.
- Pay attention to cues that the person may be overwhelmed (fidgeting, pacing).
- 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. Reassure.

- Respond to the emotions being expressed rather than the content of the words. For example, say, “You’re frightened and want to go home. It’s ok. I’m right here with you.”
- Don’t argue with the person or try to correct. 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. Let’s look at your photo book together.”

Take care of yourself

- Take care of yourself by finding a good listener to hear your thoughts and feelings about the event.
- Find moments to breathe, meditate and reflect.

The Alzheimer’s Association is the leading voluntary health organization in Alzheimer care, support and research.

Updated May 2006