

Holiday Tips for Caregivers *Preventing Loved Ones From Getting Lost*

PROVIDED BY AMAZING PLACE HEALTH SERVICES CONSULTANT
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We are approaching the hustle and bustle of the Holiday season, a time when relatives and friends bring us much joy, food and gifts! However, the Holidays can also be a time of extra stress and confusion. For people with memory problems it can be especially stressful. As you prepare for the Holidays, please review the tips below and make it a safe season for everyone.

- Try not to leave your loved one who has memory problems alone with visitors he/she may not recognize. Sometimes it will trigger “seeking” behavior, causing wandering, as they “look” for someone they recognize.
- Attempt to stay with your regular routine as much as possible. Structure can be comforting, especially during a busy season like the Holidays.
- Do not leave the person alone in the home unless there is a provision for help outside of the home, i.e. secure apartments with assisted living, emergency cords, etc.. Even someone with mild dementia may wander if left alone.
- Secure the environment so the person cannot leave by herself or himself while the caregiver is asleep or busy.
- Place locks out of reach, hide keys, and lock windows. An inexpensive tip is to put bells on top of doors to alert for a door being opened.
- Consider home security systems that monitor doors and/or motion at night.
- Register the person with the Alzheimer’s Association’s Safe Return program and ensure the person wears Safe Return jewelry or clothing tags (*see link below*)

www.alz.org/safetycenter/we_can_help_safety_medicalert_safereturn.asp

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Her career has covered many areas of teaching, advocacy and health care, mostly caring for vulnerable populations. She has worked with the March of Dimes; Harris County Hospital District; and Texas Children's Hospital. She also has written several documentaries on health issues for PBS and spent many years caring for her father who had Alzheimer's.

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- Let neighbors know that a person with memory problems lives in the neighborhood. This can be very valuable if your loved one becomes confused and wanders. (*Also, neighbors usually like to help*).
- Prepare a search-and-rescue plan just in case your loved one becomes lost.
- Keep copies of up-to-date photos ready for distribution for police, searchers, hospital and media.
- Conduct a search immediately if the person is missing, depending on mobility and ability. Usually the person is close to home.
- Be especially vigilant if your loved one is with you, at shopping malls, during the busy shopping season, because crowds can be very stressful and confusing (to everyone!!)
- If you think your loved one is missing, do not be embarrassed to contact the Police/Security as soon as possible. Time is important, especially to elders who need medicine, hydration, comfort, etc. Be sure to search in areas that may be hiding places (the woods, small buildings, cars, etc.) as fear and exhaustion may cause the person to sit down and rest.
- Don't Panic. None of us want to imagine a loved one getting lost, but, it can happen and being prepared ahead of time may ward off a frightening and dangerous experience.

References: Rowe, M.; American Journal of Nursing, 2003 and Radar, J; Geriatric Nursing, 85)