

Changed behaviour – wandering

Information about dementia for residents, family and carers



People living with dementia often behave, think and act differently to how they used to. Changes taking place in the brain can affect the memory of some people and how they find their way.

Some people who wander are very restless. They walk around for hours without stopping until they are exhausted. Other people walk at unusual times, like at night. People who wander might lose weight, fall over, or get lost and upset others by entering their private space.

What causes people to wander?

There is no single answer. People with dementia are often not able to explain what they want or what they are feeling.

They may wander to relieve stress. It may also be a sign the person is feeling upset, worried or frightened, and no longer knows what to do about it.

If a person with dementia wanders, it may be because they have a problem they need help with. This can be things like:

- being in pain
- having constipation, dehydration or having an infection
- side effects of some medicines
- feeling agitated or anxious
- wanting to leave the place they are in
- being tired or having problems sleeping
- needing to use the toilet but not being able to ask for help
- wearing uncomfortable clothes.

People who wander may also be searching for something, like:

- trying to fill a basic need such as hunger, thirst or being too hot or cold
- looking for a place to feel comfortable
- looking for a family member or loved one, such as a parent, sibling or child
- trying to return to a familiar place, such as their own room or to go home
- doing a task from the past, like going to work or picking up the children.

Caring for someone who wanders

- Be reassuring and calm.
- Look for reasons in the person's past life experiences.
- Some people have always enjoyed walking and want to continue. Make sure they can find a safe way to do this.
- Many people wander most at the same time of day. Let them wander, and walk with them.
- Offer places to rest during walks.
- Give them other exercises to do as a different activity.
- When they stop, offer them food or drinks and other enjoyable activities such as listening to music, so they can rest.

Working together

Family and carers understand the person living with dementia best.

Work together with staff to share information. This helps to develop a care plan that is centred on the person. Finding out what triggers the person's behaviour can help to reduce it.

Talk to staff and ask questions about best dementia care.

Questions to ask staff

- Have you checked for pain, illness or infection?
- Is there a care plan in place to help staff manage wandering behaviour?
- Is a dementia specialist available to be involved in care planning?
- Is there a plan if the person accidentally leaves the building or gets lost?



Want to know more?

Wandering factsheet <www.fightdementia.org>

For expert advice and support contact Dementia Behaviour Management Advisory Services on **1800 699 799** at any time of the day or night. Situations will be assessed free of charge. They can also make referrals to other services.

Disclaimer: This health information is for general purposes only. Please consult with your doctor or other health professional to make sure this information is right for you.

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