

# IDEA! Strategy

An approach to help you figure out **why** a behavior is happening and **what** you can do about it.

## Identify the behavior

- What is the behavior that is difficult for you to deal with? Be specific.
- Can you see it? Does it bother others? When does it happen? Who's around when it occurs?

## Explore what may be causing the behavior

### Understand the cause of the behavior

- **HEALTH:** Is the person taking a new medication, getting sick, or in pain?
- **ENVIRONMENT:** Is it too noisy? Is it too hot? Is the place unfamiliar?
- **TASK:** Is the activity too hard for them now? Are there too many steps? Is it something new?
- **COMMUNICATION:** Is it hard for the person to understand what you are saying?

### Understand the meaning of the behavior to the person

- Does the person feel confused, scared, nervous, unhappy, or bored?
- Does the person feel like they are being treated like a child?
- Are there things that remind the person of something that they used to do when they were younger like go to work or pick up the children from school?

## Adjust what can be done

You are the one who will need to change, the person cannot. Try different things. Pay attention to the person's feelings. Practice being calm, gentle, and reassuring.

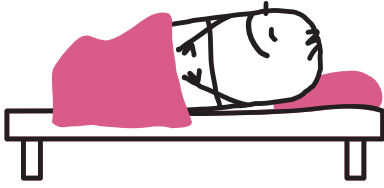
- address what is causing the behavior
  - keep tasks and activities simple
  - keep the home as calm as possible
  - speak slowly and gently — try not to say too much at once
  - do not argue — agree and comfort the person whether they are right or wrong
  - find meaningful, simple activities so the person isn't bored
- distract or redirect by:
  - offering something they like to eat
  - watching a TV show or listening to music
  - asking for their help with a simple activity
  - leading them to a different room
- accept the behavior
  - some behaviors you may need to accept rather than change
  - if there are no safety concerns and it doesn't bother the person, you may need to find ways to live with it



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# Sleeping



## WHY DOES THIS HAPPEN?

*Changes in sleep can happen for many reasons:*

- changes in the brain may cause the body's natural "clock" to change – the body can feel awake during the night and sleepy during the day
- pain from arthritis or other illnesses can wake the person
- the person needs to go to the bathroom
- the person may have problems breathing while they sleep; this can cause loud snoring
- feeling very sad or nervous can wake the person

Sleeping problems are common for people living with Alzheimer's or other dementias. Many people are restless at night and feel tired during the day. Poor sleep can also lead to other health problems.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

### KEEP A REGULAR SCHEDULE

- begin each morning at the same time and the same way
- keep them as active as possible during the day-walks, gardening, and other daytime activity is good
- avoid naps later in the day
- make sure to keep the same relaxing routine before bedtime

### OTHER THINGS YOU CAN DO

- provide as much bright light as possible during the day
- if they really want to be up at night, do not force them to be in bed or to sleep
- keep everything quiet and dark at nights
- help them avoid drinking coffee, tea, or soda with caffeine after 2PM
- give less liquids in the evening
- keep a light on in the bathroom to avoid accidents
- massages may help some people

### SPEAK WITH A DOCTOR IF:

- they have pain
- they snore badly
- they go to the bathroom a lot
- they seem very sad or nervous

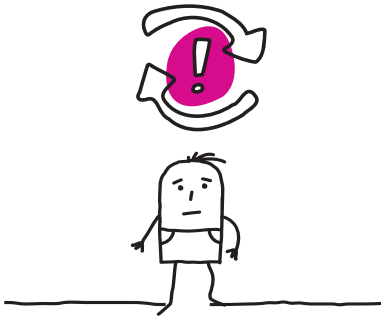
Don't use sleep medicines of any kind without speaking with a doctor first. Sleep medicines can cause confusion and falls.



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# Repeating



## WHY DOES THIS HAPPEN?

People with Alzheimer's or dementia might be:

- having problems remembering what they just said or what just happened
- repeating questions or stories because they feel nervous or afraid
- having trouble saying what they need or want



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People with Alzheimer's or dementia often ask questions or tell stories over and over. While frustrating, it is not harmful. They are not doing this on purpose. This behavior is caused by changes in the brain.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

### THINK ABOUT WHY

- new place? new people? somewhere they find scary?
- they forget that the question was asked and/or answered
- they want your attention... to feel a connection with you
- maybe they are trying to tell you about a need... hunger, concern about someone or something, urge to go to the bathroom

### ACCEPT THE BEHAVIOR

- stay calm and be patient, they can't change so you will need to
- don't argue or try to correct them
- breathe... and remember the disease is the reason
- calmly answer the question every time it's asked
- smile at the story every time it's told

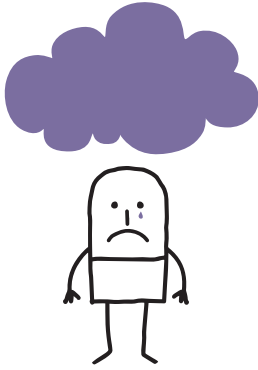
### TRY REMINDERS

- use clocks or photos of items or objects to help with questions that are repeated
- post notes or a daily schedule in a place they often look
- get a big "white board" so you can write and erase information

### WAYS TO HELP

- listen to music, watch TV, take a walk, or find something they like to do to get their mind on something else
- think first about how they are feeling and remind yourself it's not their fault
- wait until just beforehand to tell them about things that make them nervous like doctor's visits, bathing, or going out
- if you are tired and might react, and they are safe, go to another room for a bit to breathe

# Depression & Sadness



## WHY DOES THIS HAPPEN?

*People with Alzheimer's or dementia might:*

- be sad about the changes happening to them
- worry about the future
- feel alone
- feel embarrassed to talk with people
- get confused if there is too much noise

*Sometimes changes in the brain make the person lose interest in life.*

It is common for people living with Alzheimer's or dementia to become sad or depressed. They may stop seeing friends or become lonely because friends stop seeing them. They may lose interest in the things they used to do. The sadness can make them stop eating, have trouble sleeping, or make them sleep all the time. These can be signs of depression.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

### ACTIVITIES

- make a daily plan to keep them active
- encourage exercise and pleasant physical activity
- tell stories, listen to music, watch funny shows
- cook favorite foods and play pleasant music
- find things to do with other people
- think about using an adult day care center

### TALK WITH THEM

- ask how they are feeling
- don't tell them to "cheer up" or "try harder"
- comfort them, let them know that they are safe and that you care about them
- hug them if they enjoy hugs
- find a counselor who knows about depression and dementia

### MAKE HOME SAFE

- remove guns
- lock up sharp knives
- hide alcohol and medicines
- lock up poisons

### SPEAK WITH A DOCTOR IF THEY:

- talk about hurting themselves
- lose a lot of weight
- sleep all the time



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# Anger, Frustration, & Fighting



## WHY DOES THIS HAPPEN?

People with Alzheimer's or dementia might:

- be confused by:
  - new places or people
  - something they see and don't know
- become frustrated because they can't:
  - pull on a sweater
  - open a door
  - find a lost item like a purse, wallet or glasses
- be frightened/scared of:
  - the shower or bath
  - a new place or person

People with Alzheimer's or dementia can get confused, depressed, and angry. Their feelings and actions are sometimes hard for them to control.

They may hit and yell.

Don't take their words or actions personally.

Listen to what they mean, not what they are saying.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

### KEEP THINGS SIMPLE

- try to match tasks and what you expect with what your person can do
- keep your home quiet and calm when you can
- speak slowly and try not to say too much at one time

### MAKE A CHANGE

- offer a treat like a cookie or some ice cream
- lead your person to a different room
- offer to watch a TV show or listen to music
- ask a question about a topic your person enjoys

### BE SAFE

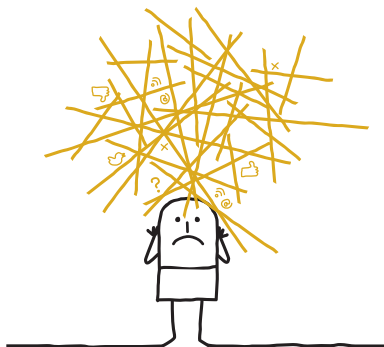
- remove or lock away all weapons (guns, knives, etc.)
- back away slowly if the behavior is scary
- call 911 if you are afraid for your or someone else's safety



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# Hallucinations



## WHY DOES THIS HAPPEN?

People with Alzheimer's or dementia might be:

- having a reaction to medicine
- taking the wrong amount of medicine
- going through changes in the brain due to the disease

People with Alzheimer's or dementia can sometimes hear, see, smell, taste, or feel something that is not really there. They may talk to someone from the past who is no longer in the home or even still alive or is a pretend friend. This can alarm close ones.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

### SEE A DOCTOR

- visit the doctor to find out the cause (bring ALL medications with you)
- tell the doctor about every time you think this has happened (keep a log — day, time, and what was going on around the person with Alzheimer's or dementia)

### THINK ABOUT THE CAUSE

- change the possible reason
- if the person doesn't know who is in the mirror, cover the mirror
- if things come out in the dark, turn on the lights or use a nightlight
- if the TV or radio is confusing or scary, turn it off

### BE REASSURING

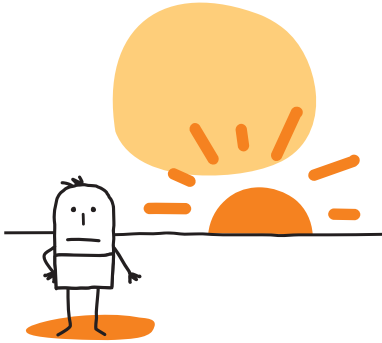
- say things like "don't worry, I'm here and will take care of you"
- agree, don't argue, about whether what's happening is real... it is real to them
- involve him or her in something pleasant to distract them



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# Sundowning



## WHY DOES THIS HAPPEN?

*People with Alzheimer's or dementia might be:*

- more tired in the late afternoon
- confused by changing amounts of light
- scared by shadows
- reacting to your feelings of being tired



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People with Alzheimer's or dementia may become more confused or nervous later in the day, often as the sun sets. This is called sundowning. They may see or hear things that are not there. They may accuse people of things that are not true, like stealing or lying, and may pace or walk back and forth. This is not done on purpose, and people with dementia cannot control it.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

### MAKE CHANGES AT HOME

- turn lights on early in the afternoon to make the house brighter
- turn down (or turn off) the television or radio
- turn on soothing music
- avoid loud or confusing noises
- clear a path for the person to walk back and forth

### PAY ATTENTION TO MEALS AND SNACKS

- provide a large meal at lunch and a light meal at dinner
- allow less caffeine, sugar, coffee, tea, and soda after 3PM
- remove access to alcohol and cigarettes

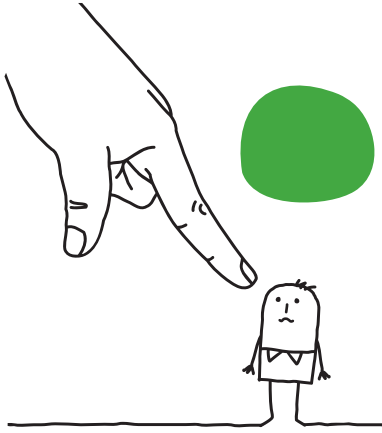
### KEEP A SCHEDULE

- make going to bed and waking up at the same time every day
- take walks or dance to use up extra energy
- plan doctor visits, outings, baths in the morning

### OTHER IDEAS

- be calm and reassuring
- be flexible... if one idea doesn't work, try another
- comfort her and say or do something to calm her fears
- try a new activity, like sorting coins or dancing

# Paranoia



## WHY DOES THIS HAPPEN?

*People with Alzheimer's or dementia might:*

- lose an item and think it was stolen
- forget something told to them and when re-told, think it's a lie
- feel a spouse is treating them differently and believe it's because of an affair
- be unable to tell what is real and what is not

People with Alzheimer's or dementia may become suspicious and frightened, even of those who love and care for them. Their world can seem strange and confusing, leading them to accuse others of stealing or lying. Don't take this personally; it is a common behavior.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

### BE COMFORTING

- stay calm and use a gentle voice
- don't argue... the situation is very real to them
- let them know they are safe and everything is okay
- hold their hand or give a hug (if they don't mind being touched)

### TRY DISTRACTION

- offer a favorite food to eat or activity to do
- help look for missing items and talk with them about items you find along the way such as photos, objects around the house, books, etc.
- take them outside for a walk or to a different room
- talk about something important to them (family, music, hobbies)

### MAKE THE ENVIRONMENT CALM AND FAMILIAR

- keep extra items that are often lost like wallets, keys, jewelry
- keep their space quiet and calm
- surround them with things they remember and cherish
- turn off the TV or radio if a show or the news are upsetting
- re-introduce yourself and others as often as needed
- play music from the past that has good memories

### OTHER TIPS

- keep notes to describe the paranoia and share with the doctor
- have legal papers to show police the person's diagnosis, your relationship, power of attorney, etc.
- join a support group or find a friend where you can talk openly about your feelings and frustrations
- remember that sometimes items really do get stolen



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# Communication



## WHY DOES THIS HAPPEN?

*People with Alzheimer's or dementia might have changes in their brains that cause them to:*

- have a tough time finding the right word
- lose their train of thought
- have problems following a conversation
- not be able to understand what you are saying
- speak only in their native or first language

People with Alzheimer's or dementia can lose their ability to speak clearly and understand what you are saying. This can be frustrating both for the person with Alzheimer's and for you.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

### USE SHORT SENTENCES & SIMPLE WORDS

- give short, one sentence answers
- offer one step directions
- slowly repeat instructions or sentences if not understood the first time
- be patient and positive, even when it takes a long time to answer
- try not to remind them that they forgot or already told you something
- ask a question and offer a simple choice of answers such as "What do you want for dinner? Fish or chicken?"
- ask questions that can be answered with yes or no
- try not to use "baby talk" or a "baby voice"
- avoid negative words. Instead of "Don't go out that door!" try "Let's go this way!" and gently guide the person away

### FOCUS THEIR ATTENTION ON YOU

- get on their eye level
- call the person by name
- remove distractions — turn off TV, go to a quiet room
- pay attention to your tone, how loudly you are speaking and your body language — which often "speak" louder than words
- be an active listener — make eye contact, nod your head

### OTHER IDEAS TO TRY

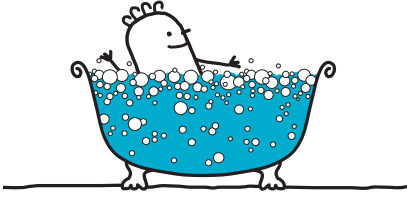
- put up signs or pictures to explain what is in the room or cabinet
- have the person's hearing tested to make sure they can hear
- use a chalk or white board to write the schedule for the day or the answers to frequently asked questions
- respond to the person's feelings or emotions, not only to words
- if conversation is hard but you want to do something together, try listening to music or looking at old family photos



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# Bathing



## WHY DOES THIS HAPPEN?

People with Alzheimer's or dementia might:

- afraid of falling
- feeling uneasy getting undressed in front of you
- scared or confused
- feeling helpless



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People with Alzheimer's disease or dementia may be afraid of bathing or uneasy with having someone help them with bathing. Sometimes they worry about falling or can have trouble knowing which is the hot versus the cold water faucets.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

### PREPARE THE BATHROOM IN ADVANCE

- make sure the room is calm and warm
- run the water so it is not too hot or too cold
- don't use bright lights if possible

### MAKE THE BATHROOM SAFE

- use a non-slip mat in the tub or shower as a bath mat
- consider a tub seat
- fill the tub with only 4 inches of water
- remove things that may be dangerous such as razors, nail clippers, hair dryer, etc.
- watch carefully — don't leave him or her alone

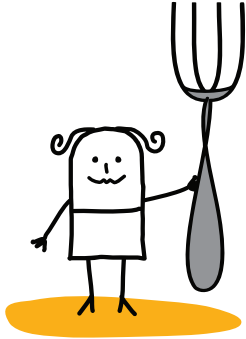
### ALLOW TIME & BE POSITIVE

- allow your person to enjoy it... if he or she finds bath time relaxing
- stay calm
- be direct... "Your bath is ready now"
- instead of "Do you want to take a bath?" give one step directions
- "Let's wash your left arm... good!, now your other one" be patient... don't rush

### BE REALISTIC

- don't argue or get frustrated... a daily bath may be too much
- consider a sponge bath instead of a tub bath
- show what you need from them... pretend to wash your arm so that he or she can copy

# Eating & Drinking



## WHY DOES THIS HAPPEN?

*People with Alzheimer's or dementia might:*

- forget that they have eaten
- forget to ask for water or food
- get confused if there are too many choices
- forget how to use forks, spoons, knives
- get confused if there is too much noise

*In the later stages of the disease they may:*

- feel like they are choking
- become messy
- lose interest in eating

Some people living with Alzheimer's or other dementias have problems with eating and drinking. This may cause illness or weakness, and it can make confusion worse.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

### KEEP IT SIMPLE

- do things the same way at every meal
- serve meals in a familiar, quiet place
- eat with them so that they see you eat, too
- make the plate a different color than the table
- use solid colors – not patterns
- don't offer too many food choices

### SUPPORT THEM

- make meals peaceful and slow
- don't worry about spills and messes – they happen!
- use no-spill cups or straws

### MAKE EATING EASY

- feed them when they are sitting up
- try serving 5-6 small meals
- try foods they can pick up with their fingers
- don't use very hot or very cold foods

### SPEAK WITH A DOCTOR IF:

- they suddenly become more confused
- they choke often
- they keep losing weight



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# Toileting



## WHY DOES THIS HAPPEN?

*People with Alzheimer's or dementia might:*

- have poor control of their body functions
- be taking medications that cause them to urinate a lot
- forget what the bathroom and toilet are used for
- feel embarrassed and ashamed to ask for help
- might not be able to find the bathroom in time
- might not be able to remove their clothes in time

People with Alzheimer's disease or dementia can have accidents when they want to go to the bathroom.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

### ALLOW TIME & BE POSITIVE

- plan for extra time... be patient... don't rush
- stay calm and use a gentle voice
- give one step directions – “let's walk this way, let's come in here”
- think about if the person is embarrassed to get undressed in front of you or a person of a different sex

### KEEP THINGS SIMPLE

- find clothes that are easy to take on and off, such as pants with an elastic waist or Velcro instead of buttons
- try to seat the person closer to the bathroom so they don't need to walk as far
- keep a light on in the bathroom so it can be seen when needed
- use a toilet seat with a bright color so that it can be seen easily
- install a raised toilet seat and grab bars – some individuals feel like they are falling when sitting down on a low toilet
- remove anything that looks like a toilet, such as a trash can

### KEEP A SCHEDULE

- create a regular schedule for using the toilet: when they wake up, before and after meals, and just before bed
- limit water and other drinks close to bedtime

### ACCIDENTS HAPPEN

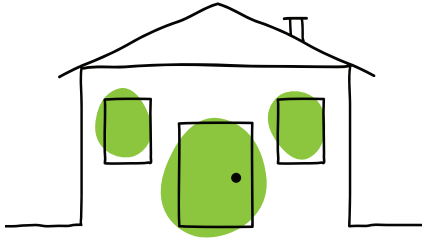
- be understanding when accidents happen
- stay calm and comfort the person if they are upset
- be prepared with supplies, such as extra clothes and wipes
- if accidents happen suddenly or more often, talk with their doctor about possible reasons – for example, a new medication or an infection may cause this to happen



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# Keeping Home Safe



## WHY DOES THIS HAPPEN?

People with Alzheimer's or dementia might:

- trip because of changes in balance or trouble walking
- have problems seeing clearly due to poor eyesight
- forget to turn off water, burners, or ovens
- forget how to use knives, etc. or where to safely place burning objects



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People with Alzheimer's or dementia may have trouble knowing what is dangerous or making safe decisions. By helping him or her feel more relaxed and less confused at home, you can help stop accidents.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

### KEEP THINGS SIMPLE

- make sure rooms are neat
- place "often used" items in the same place
- remove things that might break and aren't needed

### LOOK AT THE FLOOR

- remove small rugs, rugs that are thick, or rugs that might slide on floors
- don't shine or wax floors
- keep items off floors... cords, books, toys, bags, boxes, etc.
- make sure bathroom and kitchen floors are kept dry and avoid walking with wet feet
- use tables and chairs that are stable enough to lean on

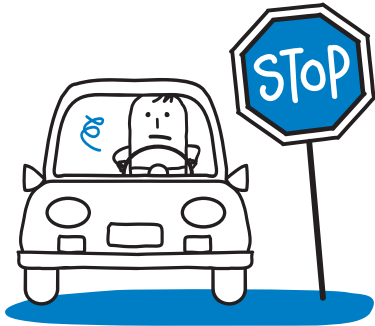
### REMOVE DANGEROUS ITEMS

- keep all medicines... vitamins, aspirin, prescriptions... in a locked box, cabinet, or drawer
- place knives, scissors, guns, sharp tools, matches, and lighters out of sight or in a locked area
- move all cleaning supplies to a high shelf or lock them away
- take off knobs from the stove and oven

### DON'T LEAVE HIM OR HER ALONE

- in the kitchen with the stove or oven on
- in the bathroom with water running
- anywhere with burning cigarettes, cigars, or pipes
- near an open or unlocked door or gate

# Driving



## WHY DOES THIS HAPPEN?

*People with Alzheimer's or dementia may be unsafe when they:*

- don't follow traffic signs
- go too fast or too slow
- become angry at others in the car or other drivers
- hit curbs
- cross over lanes
- confuse the brake and gas pedals
- forget where they are going
- get lost going places they know

Over time, driving gets harder for people with Alzheimer's or dementia. At some point they will need to stop driving and this can be very hard for them. It feels like a loss of freedom for both drivers and family members, yet SAFETY is most important.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

### KEEP AN EYE OUT

- watch for parking or traffic tickets
- look for new scratches, marks, or dents on the car
- listen for complaints about other drivers or how the car operates

### HELP THEM STOP DRIVING

- ask the doctor to tell them they can no longer drive
- make sure the doctor files a report to alert the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) of the dementia diagnosis
- have a close friend or a minister, priest, or rabbi ask your person to stop driving
- tell them someone else will drive them to the store or appointments
- ask others for help... deliver meals, pick up prescriptions, or just to visit

### BE CREATIVE

- hide the keys
- park the car out of sight
- remove the battery or starter wire
- say the car is in the shop
- get in the car first so you can be the driver
- give a set of keys that look like the old keys but won't start the car
- make having someone else drive sound like fun

### FINALLY

- sell the car... it saves money on gas, insurance, and repairs that can be used for taxis, Uber, LYFT, or paying someone to drive



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# Medications



## WHY DOES THIS HAPPEN?

People with Alzheimer's or dementia might:

- forget to take their medications
- forget that they took their medication, so they take them again and again and again
- get sick or be poisoned because the wrong pills or too many pills were taken

People with Alzheimer's or dementia may need help with taking their medicine. Taking too much... or too little... or not following the directions... can be dangerous.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

### WATCH CLOSELY

- make sure he or she:
  - takes the right number of pills at the right times
  - follows the directions on the medication
- do not leave medications in a pill box or cup on the counter
- do not leave him or her alone to take their medicine

### LOCK AWAY MEDICINE

- make sure all medications are out of sight and out of reach

### TALK TO ALL THE DOCTORS

- do not stop giving any medicine without asking the prescribing doctor first
- bring all medicines in a bag or box to every doctor
  - include vitamins, herbs, teas, creams, and other pills from the drugstore
- ask the doctor if medicines can be mixed into foods or drinks
  - this is helpful if you are having trouble getting your person to take their pills

**NOTE:** If you notice sudden changes like violent behaviors or trouble with bathroom accidents, call the doctor

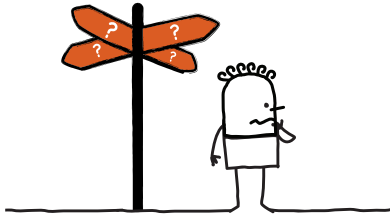
- these changes could be caused by a reaction to a medication or a new illness



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# Getting Lost



People with Alzheimer's disease or dementia can get lost outside of their home. Sometimes they wander away in a public place. They may go for a walk or to the store and not be able to find their way home. They may not remember their address or phone number.

Getting lost is scary and can be dangerous.

## WHY DOES THIS HAPPEN?

*People with Alzheimer's or dementia might:*

- be confused... mainly in the afternoon or evening
- feel fearful... home may not seem the same
- try to go somewhere they used to go often — work, church, etc.
- attempt to get away from noise or too much activity
- be bored — not having anything to do
- have a reaction to a new medicine

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

### BE PREPARED

- get a MedicAlert® bracelet for your person with dementia
- sew or write his or her name and your phone number onto clothes
- don't leave him or her alone near an unlocked door
- ask your neighbors to keep an eye out and tell you if they see your person with dementia outside alone or walking away from home
- help him or her exercise during the day... take a walk or dance to music
- put away purses, coats, keys, sunglasses... things that might make your person think about leaving
- close the curtains so he or she doesn't think about going out

### MAKE HOME A SAFE PLACE

- put child-proof locks on doors, gates, and windows
- place locks very high or low so your person with dementia can't see or reach the locks
- place a bell on doors, gates, or windows so you know if they are opened

### BE COMFORTING

- offer food or do something that will take his or her mind off wanting to leave
- ask for help... folding clothes, making dinner, etc.
- sit quietly with him or her... listen to music or watch a TV show



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