

Behavioral And Psychological Symptoms Of Dementia: Wandering Behaviour

Dementia causes people to lose their ability to recognize familiar places and faces, and it's common for a person living with dementia to wander, become lost, or feel confused about their location. This can happen at any stage of the disease.



There are many factors contribute to the wandering behaviour of someone with dementia:

- **Confusion/Disorientation to time/place:** They may feel uncertain and disoriented in a new environment. They may also suffer from sleep problems or wake up in the early hours and become disoriented. Subsequently, they may think it is daytime and decide to go for a walk.
- **Feeling anxious/fear:** They might wander in response to feeling anxious in crowded areas, such as supermarkets or restaurants.
- **Searching for the past:** They could become lost while searching for something or someone, relating to their past, such as a lost friend or a house they lived in as a child.
- **Unmet basic needs:** They might wander in response to their unmet basic needs, such as looking for foods or water due to feeling hungry/thirsty, or need to use toilet.
- **Continuing a previous routine/habit:** Those who have been used to buying groceries or had an active working history may simply wish to continue doing so.
- **Visual-spatial challenges:** They might get lost even in familiar places due to dementia's impact on their brain areas responsible for visual guidance and navigation.



Tips on how to promote safe wandering behaviour:

- **Ensure their basic needs are attended to**, such as checking if the person has visited the bathroom, and assessing if they are thirsty or hungry.
- **Familiarize yourself with their daily routines**, identifying potential times for wandering and organizing activities during those periods. Engaging in activities and exercise can effectively reduce feelings of anxiety and restlessness.
- **Encourage adherence to past routines**; for instance, they may attempt to "go to work" or shop for groceries, even if these activities are no longer necessary.
- **Equip the person with dementia with an identification card or bracelet containing their name, address, and/or contact numbers.** This proves valuable if they are found by others or come into contact with the police.

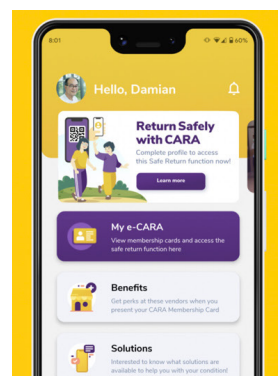
Consider the following:

- Minimize objects that might prompt or encourage individuals with dementia to wander, such as handbags and house keys.
- Eliminate any obstacles to allow individuals with dementia to wander safely. Ensure supervision is available, and the individual with dementia is steady on their feet to guarantee their safety while walking.



When a person with dementia goes missing:

- Caregiver should remain calm.
- Download CARA mobile app, register, and upload a photo to send an alert to the community if the person with dementia goes missing.
- Conduct a thorough search of the house and nearby areas.
- Try to remember what he or she was wearing before leaving the house.
- Walk or drive around the vicinity and/or visit places he or she may frequent.
- Ensure someone stays at home to await their return or answer any phone calls.
- Contact the police if immediate searches yield no results.



When the person with dementia returns home:

- Notify the police immediately if you have made a police report prior to their return.
- Refrain from scolding or expressing anxiety, regardless of how worried or inconvenienced you may be. The individual may be confused and frightened.
- Check for any injuries and assess whether they are hungry or thirsty.
- Provide reassurance and return to a regular routine as quickly as possible.

Available resources for caregivers:

Dementia Singapore

A social service agency for dementia care, caregiver support, training and consultancy.



<https://dementia.org.sg>

CARA SG

Mobile app to access personalised support for persons living with dementia and caregivers.



<https://cara.sg>

Dementia Helpline:
6377 0700

Contributed by Nursing and Psychology, Allied Health Services

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Information shared is accurate as of May 2024 and subject to revision without prior notice.



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