



Anywhere I Wander...

Wandering occurs when the person with dementia leaves a specific area, without the caregiver's knowledge or approval, and can pose risks to the person's safety. The person may be calm, such as getting lost while shopping, or may be agitated such as the person who wants to leave home late in the day trying to "find their home." People with dementia can also become lost while driving, occasionally ending up in other states or even out in the desert. Wandering occurs in about 61 percent of people living at home and 23 percent living in long term care. In other words, wandering happens frequently so all caregivers should be aware and stay vigilant.

Here are some tips that are helpful for caregivers to consider in order to minimize the chance for wandering:

- Wandering can start in early disease when the person gets lost while driving. Once lost in the car, the person should never drive alone again as they can easily become "turned around," and drive aimlessly for hours. (See the June 2009 Beacon for tips on "Driving and Dementia").
- Wandering while walking occurs in mid-disease and often corresponds to other losses such as when the person loses the ability to cook and plan daily activities. While many families think it is good for the person to walk alone or with the dog; the person may cross streets without watching traffic signals or become lost, even in a familiar neighborhood.
- The person may be shopping, in an airport, restaurant, or on a trip – especially when using a public restroom – and forgets to remain or how to return to a designated area. Caregivers must not leave the person to sit while they shop as they are likely to get up and walk away.
- In moderate to advanced dementia the person may become agitated and leave, especially late in the day or at night. Often looking for something familiar, the person may be acting on concerns about going to a job, caring for children, or another reminiscent idea.

Whenever someone is lost, the biggest concern is to find them quickly. Police officers state that 20 minutes is a critical time to ensure a safe return, particularly during summer months. Some measures that can help assure a quick return include the following:

- Enroll the person and caregiver in the "Safe Return Medic Alert" program and make sure that bracelets are worn by both parties at all times. (This is nationwide program promoting quick recovery in cooperation with the Alzheimer's Association).
- Report the person missing as soon as you start to worry. Don't give the person "20 more minutes" before notifying officials.
- Have a recent photograph of the person to help police identify the person.
- Have the person wear similar clothing all of the time so you know what the person is wearing.
- Know the general walking or driving habits of the person so the police will know where to look.

Finally don't assume that because the person hasn't wandered, it won't happen. It might well happen - so it is best to be prepared!

Additional Reading on Wandering

In Search of the Alzheimer Wanderer by Mark L Warner. Purdue University Press (September 1, 2005)

Tips for preventing wandering:

- Increase activities to keep the person busy.
- A d u l t d a y programming to get the person out of the house.
- Alert neighbors to the risk of your person wandering and encourage them to call if they see the person out.
- Make sure basic needs are met including hunger, thirst, and the need to use the rest room.
- Encourage a daily rest period.



“Ask the Expert”
By Anna Burke, MD
Memory Disorders Clinic

Dear Dr. Burke:

My dad disappeared last week. He went for a walk with the dog and the dog came home alone. It took us hours to find him. We were terrified. Are there any medications or products that can be used to prevent wandering or help find him if he wanders again?

Signed, “Scared to Death!”

Dear “Scared”:

Quick finds are essential in assuring the person’s safety. As a general rule medications are not helpful in preventing wandering. There are products that can help you locate the person or prevent the person from leaving the home unaccompanied. Web sites listed below are only examples. BAI does not recommend them.

- A “teen phone” with built in GPS device so the caregiver can locate the phone in an emergency. GPS devices that provide a map or directions to the person with dementia are not effective. www.911togo.com/GPS_child_tracking_phone/index.html
- A GPS tracking device that attaches to the car. www.alltrackusa.com/
- A GPS tracker that is worn like a wrist watch is best for

people in moderate to advanced dementia. www.911togo.com/rf_child_tracking/index.html

- Special locks and slide bolts to secure exterior doors and gates at top of stairways. www.alzstore.com/index.html

Some additional home adaptations that can be used include:

- Cueing devices to prevent wandering that my lead to leaving the home unaccompanied include “stop” signs, black rugs to put in front of a door and door camouflage for people who have advanced dementia.
- Baby monitors, jingle bells, and cowbells to alert caregivers when the person is up at night.
- Some police departments have programs with special equipment to find wanderers. Check with your local law enforcement agency to see if they participate in this program.

The good thing about your dad’s “adventure” is that he was not hurt and you are now aware of the danger so the next time this happens (it will happen again) you will be ready.

What’s New in the Library

Alzheimer’s Disease: 300 Tips for Making Life Easier (Patricia Callone) is a reader friendly guide that will provide both family and professional caregivers with new ideas to help the person with dementia to be their best in day-to-day living. The book provides strategies for each stage of the disease while always helping caregivers to maximize the abilities that remain intact. A detailed reference list provides Web sites and other resources by topic.

Learning to Speak Alzheimer’s (Joanne Koenig Coste) provides a guide for families to enhance communication between the care partner(s) and the person with dementia. Very practical conversations are addressed including talking about the disease, driving, adjusting communication techniques as the disease progresses and more. Additional practical tips are provided to address meals, activities, wandering and room design.

Next time you are at BAI, take a moment to look at the library collection and check out a book. The lending library is made possible by gifts made to the Banner Alzheimer’s Foundation.

Beacon Bits

COMPASS Classes (Care Partner Education Classes)

Community Outreach

August 4, 2009—Beatitudes Center DOAR, 555 West Glendale Avenue, Phoenix, Az. Time: 1 p.m.–3 p.m.. **Registration is required, and please call this number to register, (602) 274-5022**

August 5, 2009—Chandler Public Library Basha’s Branch, 5990 S. Val Vista Dr., Chandler, AZ. Time: 5:30 p.m.—7 p.m.

August 12, 2009—Changing Hands Bookstore, 6428 S. McClintock Dr., Tempe, AZ Time: 6:30 p.m.—8:00 p.m..

August 20, 2009—Banner Alzheimer’s Institute 901 E. Willetta Street, Phoenix, AZ 10 a.m.—11:30 a.m.

BAI Explorers is going to the Arizona Cardinals Football Stadium for a Privately Guided Tour, we would love you to come join us to view the entire stadium. The price is \$8 per person. Availability is limited.

Registration for COMPASS classes & BAI Explorer Event are required, please contact Veronica Ellis at (602) 239-6850 or e-mail her at veronica.ellis@bannerhealth.com.

Our Mission

To end Alzheimer’s disease without losing a generation, to set a new standard of care for patients and their families and to forge a model of collaboration in biomedical research.

This newsletter is made possible by the generous support of Banner Alzheimer’s Foundation.