

Alzheimer *Society*

S A S K A T C H E W A N

**Multi-step safety plan
to reduce risk of wandering:
A guide for caregivers**

Learn More [Live Well](#)

Acknowledgements

The Alzheimer Society of Saskatchewan's Multi-step safety plan to reduce risk of wandering: A guide for caregivers was adapted from the Wandering and dementia: A guide for caregivers originally published by the Alzheimer Society of B.C.

We wish to thank our colleagues at the Alzheimer Society of B.C., for their collaboration, guidance, and dedication to partnerships that help people with dementia live safely.

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The Alzheimer Society of Saskatchewan appreciates being able to include Dr. Neubauer's resource, called Canadian Guidelines for Safe Wandering: Community Version (adapted for use in Saskatchewan), in this guide.

Note: The word "wandering" has been used in this resource, but language is always changing. The term "wayfinding" may be used interchangeably with "wandering" in other publications.



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(with Identification Kit)	

Introduction

A person diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias will experience a change in his or her abilities, behaviour and communication over a period of years. Eventually, the person will need assistance with all aspects of his or her daily living.

During the early stages of the disease, individuals living with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias, are often capable of independently going for walks and participating in other meaningful activities in the community.

These individuals should be encouraged to learn about dementia, continue being involved in meaningful activities, and participate in decisions about legal and financial issues as well as their health and safety.

Families of individuals experiencing Alzheimer's disease and other dementias also benefit from learning about dementia, communication strategies and planning for the future, including safety planning. Multiple safety strategies are encouraged because no one strategy will meet every person's unique needs.

This Multi-Step Safety Plan: A Guide for Caregivers is intended to help families reduce the risk of the person with dementia, who is living at home, from becoming lost in the community.

Use this guide to learn more about wandering, understanding risk, strategies for reducing risk and preparing a multi-step safety plan.

For information, education and support, contact:

Alzheimer Society of Saskatchewan

Provincial Office

301-2550 12th Avenue, Regina, SK S4P 3X1
Phone: 306-949-4141 Toll-Free: 1-800-263-3367
info@alzheimer.sk.ca

Dementia Helpline

Toll-Free: 1-877-949-4141 helpline@alzheimer.sk.ca

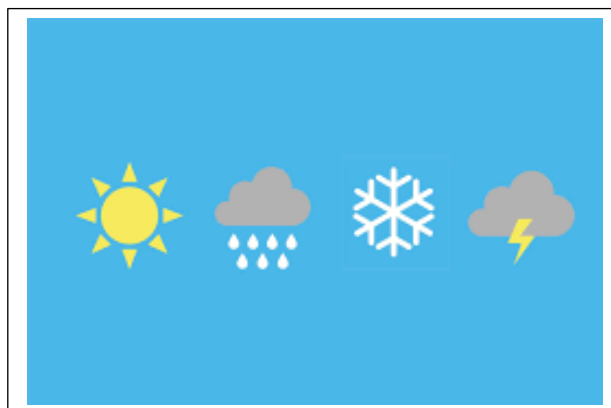
www.alzheimer.ca/sk

Understanding Wandering

Wandering

Wandering refers to a variety of behaviours that may result in a person living with dementia becoming lost. Wandering is a direct result of physical changes in the brain, and:

- It is a common behaviour associated with dementia.
- May occur at any time of the day or night.
- May lead the person with dementia outdoors which can expose him or her to traffic hazards or dangerous weather condition.
- May occur on foot, by car or public transportation.



Reasons for wandering

Figuring out why a person with dementia wanders can be difficult. While every person living with dementia is unique, there are some common reasons why they may wander:

- The person may be too hot or too cold in their current location.
- The person may be agitated due to medication side-effects, too much noise, or other forms of overstimulation.
- They may be in discomfort. For example, the person may be hungry, in pain, or in need of a washroom.
- The person may think he or she needs to leave the house to go to work or take care of his or her children.
- He or she may not recognize their current home and want to go somewhere that is more familiar.
- The person may be continuing a long-standing habit. For example, perhaps he or she has always enjoyed long walks.
- New environment may increase disorientation. Moving to a new neighbourhood or home may increase a person's wandering risk.
- He or she may be experiencing delusions and hallucinations due to dementia or medication side-effects.
- He or she may be seeking relief from boredom. Review our website for information about [suitable activities](#) and download our [Meaningful Activity](#) resource.
- He or she may not have enough opportunity for exercise during the day.
- Restlessness or changing sleep patterns can lead to confusion between night and day. Review our website for information about [sleep](#).

The factors that may be contributing to the wandering behaviour of the person I am caring for are:

Safety

The balance between risk and safety is delicate. While the act of wandering in itself is not a dangerous activity, it can become dangerous when the person living with dementia becomes disoriented or lost, or when the physical environment poses risks to his or her physical well-being. For example, busy streets with poorly marked crosswalks may increase the risk of a person becoming injured.

The **Alzheimer Society of Saskatchewan** can assist people living with dementia and their families explore practical strategies to minimize the risk of wandering and be prepared if wandering does occur.

For more information, call the **Dementia Helpline**, Toll-Free: 1-877-949-4141 or your local Alzheimer Resource Centre.



Reducing the Risk of Wandering

No one strategy will prevent a person living with dementia from wandering. **Multiple strategies are recommended** to reduce the risk.

The following are five key areas to consider.

1) Learn about the levels of risk and strategies to reduce risk of wandering

Review the first page of the **Canadian Guidelines for Safe Wandering: Community Version** (Appendix A) to better understand the levels of risk wandering – low risk, medium risk, high risk or unplanned absence.

All levels of risk benefit from multiple strategies to reduce risk because people living with dementia can **quickly** transition from one level of risk to another level of risk. **Low risk also does not mean that no multi-step safety plan is required.**

Review the second page of the **Canadian Guidelines for Safe Wandering: Community Version** (Appendix A) to better understand some of the strategies that may be used to reduce the risk of wandering. For example:

- Make **customized identification** such as:
 - Create a laminated card that can be placed inside the person's wallet or purse.
 - Sew identification labels into clothing.
 - Purchase a generic bracelet or have an existing piece of jewelry engraved.

Note: Privacy and safety should be considered when deciding what information should be included on customized identification. Also, a limitation of generic identification jewelry is that they are not connected with an emergency hotline service, and may not be recognized by police, paramedics and fire rescue.

- Fill out an **Identification Kit** (included in Appendix B: Multi-Step Safety Plan for Reducing Risk of Wandering). This kit can help organize vital information about the person living with dementia. If he or she goes missing, you will have this information on hand to assist police.

2) Examine the immediate environment

Enable safe wandering

Like walking and other types of physical movement, wandering can often be a coping mechanism for people living with dementia. If the person is able to go on walks alone, encourage him or her to walk a familiar route, and let someone know when they are expected to return from their walk. If there are concerns about the person becoming lost when leaving the home or walking alone:

- Consider using an alarm, like a bell that signals when a door is opened, or other types of technology such as locating devices.
- For more information about the **ethical considerations** and **deciding on a device**, review **Locating Devices**: alzheimer.ca/locatingdevices.
- Have a family member or a friend spend time outside with the person or accompany him or her on walks.
- Arrange a safe option for the person to enjoy time sitting outside or walking on his or her own (e.g., a yard with a fence and locked gate).

Provide visual cues

- Familiar objects, furniture and pictures can provide a sense of comfort and belonging.
- Leaving a light on in the hallway or placing an illuminated clock beside the bed may help reduce disorientation at night.
- Labels on doors may help the person find their way around the home.



Reduce triggers

Many people living with dementia refer to “triggers” (something that may cause agitation, increased stress or more difficulty thinking). Understanding the person’s triggers for wandering and how to manage them may help reduce wandering behaviour.

- Keep objects associated with the outdoors out of the person’s view. For example, car keys, jackets, and shoes.
- If possible, place door locks above eye level or where the person cannot see them.
- Try to disguise doors by decorating or covering them so they do not look like doors.
- Anticipate times the person may wander or has wandered before, like later in the day as nightfall approaches.

Some people living with Alzheimer’s disease or other dementias may experience more confusion, restlessness or agitation later in the day.

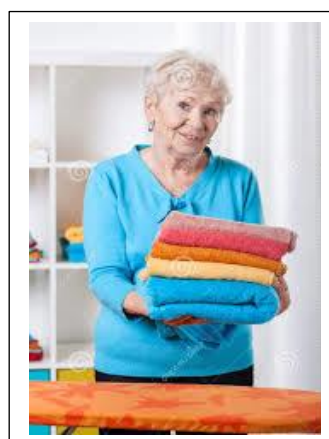
3) Ensure opportunities for exercise and other meaningful activities

Exercise can help the person use up extra energy and may improve the person’s sleep patterns. Like walking and other types of physical movement, wandering can often be a coping mechanism for people living with dementia.

Although light to moderate physical activity such as brisk walking is safe for most people, it is important to consult with the person’s physician or health-care provider before starting an exercise program.

Everyone enjoys participating in meaningful activities where they can feel successful.

- Engage the person in an activity they may enjoy. For example, looking at pictures.
- Involve the person in day-to-day household activities (e.g., peeling potatoes, setting the table, folding laundry, reorganizing a toolbox).
- Consider the person's past interests when planning activities.
- Try not to become upset or frustrated if activities are not done "right." The important thing is that the person living with dementia feels included and important.
- Be flexible. Modify activities to adapt to the person's current abilities.
- Try another activity if the person becomes bored or frustrated.



4) Maintain community connections and establish new supports

- Let family, friends, neighbours and others in your community know that the person living with dementia has a potential to wander. Ask them to stay alert and notify you if they think the person is confused or lost. (Note: If possible, ask the person with dementia's permission to share their diagnosis with others before doing so.)
- If you have not done so already, contact your local Alzheimer Society Resource Centre for information, education and support or call the **Dementia Helpline**, Toll-Free: 1-800-949-4141.
- Connect with your local community centre for socialization and support.

Preparing a Multi-Step Safety Plan

1) Use multiple strategies to help the person living with dementia, who is living at home, from becoming lost in the community (Appendix B).

- Make customized identification.
- Fill out an Identification Kit.
- Consider using a locating device or GPS. For information, visit alzheimer.ca/locatingdevices

- Note: Additional strategies may be helpful to ensure safety in the home, help with disaster preparation and reduce the risk of elder abuse. For more information, contact the Alzheimer Society of Saskatchewan or review the website: <https://alzheimer.ca/en/help-support/im-caring-person-living-dementia/ensuring-safety-security>

Ask the person's family physician if a referral to other health professionals, such as an Occupational Therapist, may be helpful for suggestions about equipment and strategies to assist with safety and reduce risk of falls.

2) List community supports

3) Keep records

Keeping an ongoing journal or record can help provide insights into reasons for the person's wandering behaviour. Understanding the person's wandering patterns and triggers can help you put strategies in place. Useful things to record include:

- Was the wandering dangerous?
- Why do you think the wandering occurred?
- How long did the behaviour last?
- What seemed to help the person relax after the incident?



All about me is a record-keeping tool that can be used to know the person living with dementia better. It is available [online](#).

If the person with dementia moves to a personal care home or a long-term care home, discuss wandering and multi-step safety plans as part of his or her personal Plan of Care.

Additional Resources

Activity:

- **Finding Suitable Activities:** <https://alzheimer.ca/en/help-support/im-caring-person-living-dementia/providing-day-day-care/finding-suitable-activities>
- **Meaningful Activity Booklet:** <https://archive.alzheimer.ca/sites/default/files/files/sk/fact-sheets/meaningful%20activity%20booklet%202020.pdf>

Helpful Routines and Reminders, including the All about Me booklet:

- <https://alzheimer.ca/en/help-support/im-living-dementia/managing-changes-your-abilities/helpful-routines-reminders>

Alzheimer's Disease and Other Dementias:

- **Stages of Alzheimer's Disease:** <https://alzheimer.ca/en/about-dementia/what-alzheimers-disease/stages-alzheimers-disease>
- **Resources about other types of dementias:** <https://alzheimer.ca/en/help-support/dementia-resources/national-resource-library>

Behaviour (Responsive Behaviour):

- **Responsive and Reactive Behaviours:** <https://alzheimer.ca/en/help-support/im-caring-person-living-dementia/understanding-symptoms/responsive-reactive-behaviours>
- **Shifting Focus - A Guide to Understanding Dementia Behaviour (Full Version):** https://alzheimer.ca/sites/default/files/files/on/shifting-focus/shifting_focus_full_guide.pdf
- **Wandering and Dementia - A Guide for Caregivers** (Alzheimer Society of British Columbia): <https://archive.alzheimer.ca/sites/default/files/files/bc/advocacy-and-education/wandering/wandering-and-dementia-a-guide-for-caregivers-interactive.pdf>
- **Understanding Behaviour:** <https://alzheimer.ca/en/help-support/im-caring-person-living-dementia/understanding-symptoms/changes-mood-behaviour>

Communication:

- **Tips for communicating with a person with dementia:** <https://alzheimer.ca/en/help-support/i-have-friend-or-family-member-who-lives-dementia/communicating-people-living-dementia>

Finding Your Way (Alzheimer Society of Ontario): www.findingyourwayontario.ca

Pain Matters - A Family Guide to Pain Management in Dementia:

<https://archive.alzheimer.ca/sites/default/files/files/on/pain%20matters/painmattersbooklet.pdf?ga=2.243836101.152115105.1602257177-1787682968.1602257177>

Safety:

- **Living Safely - A By Us for Us® Guide** (Research Institute for Aging): <https://the-ria.ca/resources/by-us-for-us-guides/>
- **Locating Devices:** alzheimer.ca/locatingdevices
- **Safety in the Home:** <https://alzheimer.ca/en/help-support/im-caring-person-living-dementia/ensuring-safety-security/making-your-environment-safe>
- **Safety, Technology and Assistive Devices** (brainXchange): <https://brainxchange.ca/Public/Resource-Centre-Topics-A-to-Z/Safety-technology-and-assistive-devices.aspx>
- **Safety When Out and About - A By Us For Us® Guide** (Research Institute for Aging): <https://the-ria.ca/resources/by-us-for-us-guides/>

Sleep:

- **Personal care - When sleep becomes an issue: Tips and strategies:** https://archive.alzheimer.ca/sites/default/files/files/national/brochures-day-to-day/sleep_en.pdf?_ga=2.50979049.152115105.1602257177-1787682968.1602257177
- **Sleep:** <https://alzheimer.ca/en/sk/Living-with-dementia/Day-to-day-living/Sleep>

About Us

If you would like to know more about our organization or if you would like to make a donation, please contact us:

Alzheimer Society of Saskatchewan

Provincial Office

301-2550 12th Avenue, Regina, SK S4P 3X1
Phone: 306-949-4141 Toll-Free: 1-800-263-3367

info@alzheimer.sk.ca

www.alzheimer.ca/sk

Resource Centres

Cypress Resource Centre

Swift Current

Phone: 306-773-2683

cypress@alzheimer.sk.ca

Prairie North Resource Centre

Battleford

Phone: 306-445-2206

prairienorth@alzheimer.sk.ca

Prince Albert Parkland Resource Centre

Prince Albert

Phone: 306-922-2296

paparkland@alzheimer.sk.ca

Regina Qu'Appelle Resource Centre

Regina

Phone: 306-949-4141

regina@alzheimer.sk.ca

Saskatoon Resource Centre

Saskatoon

Phone: 306-683-6322

saskatoon@alzheimer.sk.ca

Sun Country Resource Centre

Estevan

Phone: 306-842-2273

suncountry@alzheimer.sk.ca

Sunrise Resource Centre

Yorkton

Phone: 306-786-3600

sunrise@alzheimer.sk.ca

To access information, education and support in your community, call us through our provincial toll-free service:

Dementia Helpline

Toll-Free: 1-877-949-4141

helpline@alzheimer.sk.ca



Appendix A – Canadian Guideline for Safe Wandering: Community Version (First Page)

COMMUNITY VERSION

RISK OF GETTING LOST	Low Risk	Medium Risk	High Risk	Unplanned Absence
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Initial signs present or diagnosis of dementia <input type="checkbox"/> No history of getting lost <input type="checkbox"/> Lives with family and is supervised 24/7 <input type="checkbox"/> No interest in going outside home without having someone accompany them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Limited supervision at home <input type="checkbox"/> History of exercising as a means of alleviating stress <input type="checkbox"/> Regularly engages in outdoor/community activities <input type="checkbox"/> Becomes frequently overwhelmed or anxious <input type="checkbox"/> At a stage where identify themselves in their earlier years. Talks of going to work or wanting to go home <input type="checkbox"/> Regularly states intent to leave home 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Regularly goes for walks alone <input type="checkbox"/> Lives at home alone <input type="checkbox"/> In the later stages of dementia, they may frequently walk away from care partner when out in the community <input type="checkbox"/> Pattern of preparing to go outside (i.e., putting coat and shoes on, grabs bag/purse) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Lost within the community <input type="checkbox"/> Is missing, has lost one's way
STRATEGIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education and awareness • Developing a plan of preventative strategies • Talk to care provider ASAP • Watch for signals seen in medium and high risk • Register under a vulnerable persons registry if available* • Identification strategies (e.g., ID tags/ bracelets/kit)* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redirection strategies • Exercise with a partner or use a locating technology • Add list of where used to live/work • Increased supervision (i.e., day programs, locating devices or buddy system for those that live alone) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Locating technologies • Alarms/surveillance • Locks and barriers • Buddy system • Seek community supports (i.e. home care) • Relocation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Call 911 immediately • Search and rescue methods • Community involvement
	<p>Can transition to lesser or greater levels of risk at any moment</p> <p>Need to apply education and proactive strategies as soon as possible so can still encourage safe wandering</p>			
	<p><i>NOTE: Strategies with a star (*) next to it could be applied to any risk level</i></p>			

Appendix A – Canadian Guideline for Safe Wandering: Community Version (Second Page)

LIST OF AVAILABLE STRATEGIES

Low Risk

- Keep a list of people to call on for help
- Education and awareness
 - o Finding Your Way Program (<http://findingyourwayontario.ca>)
 - o Alzheimer Society of Saskatchewan (<https://alzheimer.ca/en/sk>)
- Register participant with the Vulnerable Person Registry (if available) or with an identification program

Medium Risk

- Redirection strategies:
 - o Providing meaningful activities (i.e. chores, tasks, etc.) or play music that they grew up to
 - o Install signs to assist in way-finding
- Have person with dementia exercise with a partner or use a locating technology (<https://tech.findingyourwayontario.ca>)
- Keep a list at home of the places the person with dementia used to live and work
- Increase supervision (i.e., day programs, locating devices or a buddy system for those with dementia that live alone)

High Risk

- Keep car keys out of sight
- Avoid busy places that are confusing and can cause disorientation
- Increase supervision (i.e., day programs, tracking devices or being connected to a care worker for those that live alone)
- Install locks or alarm systems on the exit door or window to know when it is opened *Disclaimer: locks should ONLY be implemented when the care partner is at home for safety reasons such as fire risk, etc.*
- Consider locating technologies such as Commercial GPS (<https://tech.findingyourwayontario.ca>) or GPS devices available on your phone (e.g. Find My Friend App or Google maps)
- Install door murals (painted camouflaged exit doors), place mirrors or curtains in front of the exit door
- Ensure someone has descriptors readily accessible of the person with dementia (i.e. photo, locations they like to go to, etc.)
- Place identification information on items of clothing, or objects they regularly use (i.e., walker, wallet)
- Discuss long term care options

Unplanned Absence

- Call 911 immediately DO NOT wait 24-48 hours to alert the police. The police want to know right away about the missing person even if you find them soon after. The longer you wait to call the greater the risk they are at for being found seriously injured or deceased
- Notify the community to keep a look out for the missing person

Appendix B: Multi-Step Safety Plan for Reducing Risk of Wandering

Date: _____ Revision Date: _____

Name: _____

Keep this plan in an easy to locate place.

Strategies to reduce the risk of wandering:

Strategies	Date Started
Make customized identification.	
Fill out the Identification Kit (pages 16-18).	
Consider using a locating device or GPS.	

Community Supports:

Names	Relationships	Phones

DO NOT wait 24-48 hours to contact the police if the person living with dementia goes missing.

Name and Contact Information

First name: _____
 Last name: _____
 Nickname: _____
 Date of Birth: _____
 Gender: _____
 Language(s) spoken: _____
 Home address: _____

 Cell phone: _____

Physical Description

Height: _____
 Weight: _____
 Eye colour: _____
 Hair colour: _____
 Hair style: _____
 Ethnicity: _____
 Complexion: _____

Identifying Features

Check all that apply:

Hearing aid(s) Visual aid(s)
 Dentures Cane
 Walker Wheelchair
 Other: (e.g., scars, birthmarks
 tattoos). Describe:

Recent Photo



Wandering History

Has the person wandered before? Yes/No
 What are the person's favourite places to visit? _____

Where did the person used to work?

What transit routes has the person taken in the past? _____

Locating Device(s) – Does the person have a locating device? Yes/No
 Note the type/model and describe: _____

Medical Information

Medical condition(s): _____

Allergies: _____

Medication(s): _____

Doctor's name: _____

Doctor's phone: _____

Personal Identification

Is the person wearing a form of
identification? Yes/No

Describe identification: _____

For People with Access to a Vehicle

License plate number: _____

Vehicle colour: _____

Vehicle brand/model: _____

Emergency Contact Person(s)

Name: _____

Relationship to the person living with

dementia: _____

Home phone: _____

Cell phone: _____

Work phone: _____

Address: _____

Name: _____

Relationship to the person living with

dementia: _____

Home phone: _____

Cell phone: _____

Work phone: _____

Address: _____

Name: _____

Relationship to the person living with

dementia: _____

Home phone: _____

Cell phone: _____

Work phone: _____

Address: _____

Other notes:

If a missing incident occurs, begin searching immediately:

- Check common areas (e.g., all rooms in the home, outdoor spaces surrounding the home, garage, shed).
- Contact the police and tell them that a person with dementia is missing:
 - Do not wait 24-48 hours.
 - Tell the police if the person has a form of identification on them and give them details.
 - Share the Identification Kit.
 - If the person may be in a vehicle, share vehicle description with police.
 - If the person may be using public transit, share information about transit routes they have used in the past.
 - If the person's credit cards are gone, inform police.
 - Consider notifying credit cards companies as tracking their use may help locate the person.
- Alert family, friends and neighbours that the person is missing. Ask them to help with the search.
- Ensure that someone stays at home in case the person returns.
- Remain calm when the person is found. Provide reassurance.