
For Caregivers: Safety Tips for People With Dementia

The symptoms of dementia can sometimes lead to unsafe situations. Areas of special concern include driving and wandering away from home. You may also need to make changes in your loved one's living space. These can help protect your loved one even when you aren't around.



Discourage driving

Driving is often not safe for a person with dementia. It may even be illegal. Ask the healthcare provider if it's safe for your loved one to drive. Some rehabilitation centers can assess driving safety. Ask your healthcare provider if such a driving assessment is recommended. If safety is in question, use these tips to prevent him or her from getting behind the wheel:

- Limit access to the car. Keep the keys with you or lock them away.
- Ask an authority figure, such as a healthcare provider or insurance agent, to tell your loved one not to drive.
- Ask your healthcare provider about contacting the Department of Motor Vehicles.

Watch for wandering

People with dementia may wander away from the house and get lost. They often have a reversed sleep-wake cycle. This means they can be up all night and wander away when you least expect it. To keep your loved one safer, try these tips:

- Have your loved one wear an ID bracelet at all times. You can also enroll your loved one in the Alzheimer's Association's "Safe Return" program.
- Install door chimes so you know when outside doors are being opened.
- Ask neighbors to call you if they see your loved one out alone.
- Go with your loved one if they insist on leaving the house. Don't argue or yell. Instead, use distraction or gentle hints to get them to return home.

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- Look into web-based monitoring programs that keep track of your loved one's location

Make living spaces safe

Keep your loved one safe by simplifying their living space. This means reducing clutter and removing hazards. Put night lights and smoke detectors in every room, including the kitchen and bathroom. Keep the batteries fully charged. You may also want to get advice from an occupational therapist (home safety expert). Keep in mind that some changes may not be needed right away. Focus on major safety concerns first.

In living spaces

Suggested safety steps include:

- Install smoke alarms and nightlights.
- Display emergency numbers and the home address near all phones.
- Install an answering machine so important messages aren't missed.
- Reduce tripping hazards. Move electrical and phone cords out of the way. Place colored tape on the edges of steps.

In the bathroom

Suggested safety steps include:

- Store hair dryers, razors, and curling irons in a secure area.
- Remove poisons, such as drain cleaner and nail polish remover.
- Keep medicines in a secure area, not in the medicine cabinet.
- Remove inside door locks so your loved one doesn't get locked inside.

In the kitchen

Suggested safety steps include:

- Unplug toasters and other appliances when not in use.
- Limit access to alcohol. It can make symptoms much worse.
- Remove or cover knobs on stoves and other appliances.
- Check food for spoilage. Your loved one may not know when food has gone bad.

Other areas of the home

Suggested safety steps include:

- Lock up hazardous substances, such as bleach, pesticides, and paint thinners.
- Keep pool or hot tub areas securely closed off.

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- Set the hot water heater below 120°F (48.8°C).
 - Keep a spare key outside the house in case your loved one locks you out.

Prevent fraud

People with dementia may be easy victims for dishonest salespeople or money scams. Try placing a “No Solicitations” sign on your loved one’s front door. Add their phone number to the Federal Trade Commission’s “Do Not Call” list (888-382-1222). Limit access to credit cards and cash.

Can my loved one live alone?

Early on, people with dementia can often handle daily tasks with little or no help. But at some point it won't be safe for them to be on their own. The timing for this is different for each person. But problems such as forgetting to eat, bathe, or take medicines, or having financial problems can all be signs that more supervision is needed. If you have concerns, talk with your loved one’s healthcare provider.