

Dementia and Travelling Tips

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Travel and holidays are often part of retirement or recreational plans. However, for people living with dementia and their carers, travel and holidays may require greater planning as the disease progresses. The person living with dementia may or may not want to travel and may have little insight into the potential problems. Carers may be anxious and unsure how the person living with dementia will respond to changes to environment and routine during the holiday.

With early planning, strategies can be put in place to reduce the risk of problems occurring and increase the likelihood of travelling having positive outcomes for both the carer and the person living with dementia. Consideration should be given to the person's current capacity for independence, their safety (e.g. physical, psychological, financial), preferences, routines and options as change can contribute to anxiety, insecurity or confusion.

Steps that you may take to make travel and holidays pleasant experiences are:

- Plan early to identify potential problems
- Will you enjoy this form of travel if the person with dementia cannot be left alone
- Take a trial overnight or short trip
- If you book flights or a cruise 6 months ahead, can you cancel if the person with dementia becomes less able to participate in the holiday
- Research travel insurance. Check re pre-existing conditions e.g. dementia and premiums
- Have an emergency and contingency plan in place including a plan to cover changes to your own health as

Alzheimer's Queensland

Ph 07 3422 3000 • Fax 07 3343 2557

Dementia Help Line 1800 639 331 • Education Enquiries: 1800 180 023

47 Tryon Street, Upper Mt Gravatt, Queensland 4122

enquiries@alzqld.org.au • www.alzheimersonline.org

the primary carer. (What will I do if.....? Who would I contact if.....? What would it cost to fly/travel home early.....?)

- Seek specialist or GP advice prior to travel. Take a medical history summary including a current medication list
- Take sufficient medication for the time frame. Monitor medication compliance
- Avoid travel during peak periods or when the person is fatigued or likely to be more confused
- Solo travel may be undertaken under controlled situations e.g. flying from one airport to another may be undertaken when there is a familiar support person to guide at both ends. When the airline is informed escorts on and off the plane may be arranged including support through customs if inspections were requested and the person may not fully understand.
- At airport check points, carers may follow after the person with dementia in case the person is taken aside for further checks and they become confused. The medical letter with the diagnosis could be shown.
- Choose the shortest and fastest mode of transportation
- If travelling by plane or train limit layovers or train changes, and if stopping allow for longer stopovers
- If traveling in plane or train request is suitable e.g. noise, lighting, toilet and bathroom access and aids for transfers if needed
With an unfamiliar environment, ensure you have securely locked the door and consider using a portable door exit alarm
- Consider a light on at night to allow for visibility and reduce disorientation
Be prepared to ask for assistance seating near toilets to enable easy access
- Take familiar activity to distract or to occupy time e.g. ear phones and music may distract from surrounding noise or changed environment
- Maintain daily routines similar to home to reduce the chance of confusion e.g. eating (time and type of foods), sleeping or rest routines
- Consider use of identification bracelets

- Carry a recent photograph of the person with you
- Consider GPS tracking devices to assist in locating or monitoring the whereabouts of the individual. Check with the provider or manufacturer that the tracking device works overseas
- Take a list of important contacts – medical doctor and family members
- Pack familiar personal belongings. Avoid excessive hand luggage e.g. keep on hand only personal items, change of clothing and medication needed
- Be prepared to carry the important items such as money, passport etc. yourself
- Leave a copy of important documents with someone else at home and carry a copy with yourself as well
- If staying with friends/family or in a hotel, ensure you have communicated that there can be special needs and check that the people and environment

Some signs that indicate travel may be difficult or unwise include:

- Wanting to go home when out on short visits
- Disorientation or agitation in familiar environment
- Episodic or persistent behaviours such as aggression, paranoia, hallucinations, wandering in familiar environments
- Difficult to reassure, redirect or distract
- Episodes of not recognising carers, family
- Difficulty with managing incontinence
- Signs of being overwhelmed such as teary and anxious in noisy or unfamiliar environments
- Unstable medical conditions
- Frequent falls

Help and assistance is available. For further information please contact Alzheimer's Queensland on the Advice Line: 1800 639 331

