

## Dementia and travelling

Many families and carers have happy and fulfilling times travelling with a person with dementia. Trips may include overseas or interstate travel and may be for reminiscence, family gatherings, sightseeing or relocation to a different care situation.

Travelling with a person who has dementia can present a number of hazards and challenges. It is usually better to travel in the early stages of the illness as the person may become too disoriented, agitated or distressed further down the track.

Although people with dementia generally do best in well-ordered, familiar and stable settings, travel can be successful given the right conditions and thoughtful planning.

### Warning signs against travel

There are a number of signs you need to be aware of, which may indicate that travel is inappropriate:

- Consistent disorientation or agitation in familiar settings
- Wanting to go home when away from home on short visits
- Delusional, paranoid, aggressive or disinhibited behaviour
- Problems managing continence
- Teary, anxious, withdrawn behaviour in crowded, noisy settings
- Agitated or wandering behaviour.

If any of these signs are present, it may mean that travel is not a good idea.

If the travel is unavoidable, it is advisable to consult a specialist to explore whether medication may be useful to settle the person. Providing a familiar and reassuring companion is the first consideration.

If none of the signs are present, it may still be useful to undertake a 'trial run' by taking a short trip using the type of transport that is planned for the longer trip. This will help establish the person's travel capacity. It will also give a good idea of whether to pursue the original plan or not.

### Travelling overseas

For those who are planning an overseas trip, it is important to seek specialist advice well in advance of departure and to develop contingency plans for unexpected diversions or cancellation of your trip. It will help if you follow a few simple steps:

- Build in flexibility in stopovers to enable the person to adjust gradually to time differences.
- Inform the person arranging the travel that longer stopping times in each location are needed.
- Allow plenty of time to investigate the best travel insurance policy for the situation.

### Tips for carers travelling with someone with dementia

There are a number of things you can do to make travel more enjoyable for yourself as the carer and for the person with dementia.

### General travel tips for families and carers

- Be prepared to do everything for two. This can be taxing, so try to get plenty of rest before the trip.
- You need to hold all important possessions – passports, money, schedules and tickets.

- Encourage the person with dementia to wear an identification bracelet at all times. Also, make sure that the following information is in their wallet or purse: name, address and phone number of your away-from-home address. Mark all clothing with their name.
- Take a list of important contacts such as doctors and family.

### **Travelling by plane (or other transport)**

- If appropriate, notify the airlines that you are travelling with someone with dementia. Generally, they offer assistance and are most helpful.
- If necessary, ask for assistance from airline personnel when the person needs to use the public toilet. Request seating close to the toilet to avoid long walks.
- If possible, check the luggage all the way through to the final destination. Wheels on luggage are a must, or invest in a lightweight suitcase.
- Take a minimum of clothing. But do remember to take along a change of clothes on the plane.

### **Medications**

- Remember to take enough medications to cover the period of travel as well as prescriptions.
- Take a list of recent and current medications, which may be helpful if the person with dementia becomes unwell.

### **A safe away-from-home environment**

- If you are staying in a hotel and wandering is a problem, lock the door to the room using the safety latch and place a chair in front of it. Consider a portable door alarm that goes off if disturbed.
- Leave the bathroom light on all night.
- Unfamiliar knobs can be confusing to a person with dementia. For example, make sure you turn the shower on and adjust the temperature.
- Be aware of large toilet blocks that have more than one entry or exit point. Consider using disabled and family facilities where possible, as they may provide more space and you can remain together.

### **Making travel less stressful**

- Always ask for assistance. People cannot help if they don't know there is a problem.
- Keep a sense of humour and laugh at the funny things that happen along the way.
- Allow plenty of time for everything.

### **Travelling by car**

When travelling by car, consider:

- Whether the person is comfortable in the seat, especially when travelling for long distances
- Whether the person needs help doing up and undoing the seat belt
- The safety of the person when getting out of the car, especially when parking near traffic
- The person's state of mind. Do not drive alone with a person who is agitated. Your safety, as well as theirs and that of other people using the roads, may be at risk.

### **Where to get help**

- Your doctor
- Your local community health service
- Your local council
- The Cognitive Dementia and Memory Service (CDAMS) clinic – your doctor can provide details of the CDAMS closest to you
- Alzheimer's Australia National Dementia Helpline Tel. 1800 100 500
- Carer Support and Respite Coordination Centre Tel. 1800 059 059
- Carer Resource Centres Tel. 1800 242 636
- The Aged Care Information Line Tel. 1800 500 853

## Things to remember

- Travelling with a person who has dementia can present a number of hazards and challenges. However, it is generally possible with care and planning.
- Be aware of the warning signs that may indicate travel is inappropriate.
- Seek specialist advice well in advance of departure if needed and develop contingency plans for unexpected occurrences.
- Always ask for assistance, try to keep a sense of humour and allow plenty of time for everything.

## Want to know more?

Go to [More information](#) for support groups, related links and references.

## This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Alzheimer's Australia Victoria

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