

Travelling

This help sheet provides information for families and carers about travelling with someone with dementia. It lists considerations for when travel may be inappropriate and offers suggestions for planning a trip and travelling.

Travelling and going on holidays can be a joyous activity and a great way to make cherished memories. Although living with dementia may present some challenges, that doesn't necessarily mean you need to put travel plans aside.

Being aware of someone's abilities can help in deciding where to go and what you might do when taking a holiday.

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

Before you decide to travel

Signs that travelling and holidays may not be suitable for someone living with dementia:

- If they regularly feel disoriented, confused or agitated, or want to go home when they are out on short visits.
- If they have a tendency to wander off.
- If they regularly have incontinence problems that are hard to manage or caused by disorientation.
- If they are unable to walk safely or for long distances.
- If they have problems with mobility and balance, or a high risk of falling.
- If they feel angry or anxious when their needs are not met, causing them to have physical or emotional responses.
- If they have other unstable medical conditions.
- If there are concerns about arranging additional assistance for the person with dementia, if it was needed, at the travel destination.

Planning

If you are unsure whether travelling is a good idea, seek the advice of the person's doctor. You could discuss how long you plan to be away and the person's abilities, what medications are required and if there is medication that may make travel easier.

Be aware that it is common for people living with dementia to become disorientated when they are travelling.

It is important to plan ahead, to reduce delays and unnecessary disruptions.

Consider including the person in planning your travel. This can help them prepare for the trip and reduce feelings of anxiety about travelling to a new environment.

Share pictures or watch television programs about the places you plan to visit. Include the person in conversations with people you are visiting. Also consider trialling a short domestic holiday before doing a longer or international trip.

When planning a trip, have contingency plans for unexpected itinerary changes or cancellations.

Tips for travelling with someone with dementia

- Be prepared to provide as much support to the person as they need.
- Always ask for assistance. People cannot help you if they don't know there is a problem.
- Mark all the person's clothing with their name.
- Ensure you have copies of passports, tickets and itineraries so you have a backup if one gets lost.
- Luggage with wheels is helpful, or use a lightweight suitcase.
- Consider using Bluetooth tracking tags in all bags.
- Take a list of important contacts, such as doctors and family members.
- Pack enough medications to cover the period of travel, as well as prescriptions. In some countries, you may need a doctor's letter detailing prescribed medications.
- Take a list of the person's current and recent medications, which may be helpful if they become unwell.

- When visiting large toilet blocks, check if there are multiple entry and exit points. Consider using accessible or family cubicles, where there is more room and you can stay together.
- Leave the bathroom light on all night.
- Keep a sense of humour and laugh together at the funny things that happen along the way.
- Allow plenty of time for everything.
- Be prepared to change plans if it becomes stressful.

To help reconnect you if you become separated, make sure the person with dementia is carrying:

- personal identification, such as an id card in their wallet or purse
- an identification bracelet, that indicates they have dementia
- your contact details (as their carer)
- the name, address and phone number of your holiday accommodation.

Consider:

- a mobile phone or smart watch with GPS tracking; activate global roaming service if travelling overseas.

Tips for travelling by air or sea

- Allow time to investigate the best travel insurance for your situation.
- To enable the person with dementia to adjust gradually to time differences, build in flexibility and stopovers.
- When booking flights or cruises, ask for special assistance for the person living with dementia. Special assistance can provide easy passage through all stages of boarding and travel across borders.
- Request seating close to the toilet to avoid long walks. Requesting an aisle seat may also be helpful.
- If possible, check luggage through to your final destination.
- Take a change of clothes on the plane.
- To tune out noise, set up music on a portable player or a mobile phone. Listen using noise-cancelling earphones or headphones.
- Packed snacks may be useful as a diversion.

Tips for travelling by car

- Drive safely. Do not get in the car if the stress and anxiety levels of the person living with dementia may impact on your ability to drive safely and effectively.
- Where possible, engage the safety lock to prevent accidental opening of the door. Be aware of the person's safety when getting out of the car, especially when parking, or near traffic.
- Check the person is comfortable in the seat. Make sure the seatbelt is not too tight or restrictive.
- Be confident about the route before setting off.
- If using a hire car, request GPS navigation.

Additional reading and resources

- Travelling and holidays with dementia booklet
Visit: dementia.org.au/Travelling-with-dementia.pdf
- Dementia Australia support
Visit: dementia.org.au/support
- Dementia Australia library service
Visit: dementia.org.au/library
- Dementia Australia education
Visit: dementia.org.au/education

Further information

Dementia Australia offers support, information, education and counselling.

National Dementia Helpline: 1800 100 500

For language assistance: 131 450

Visit our website: dementia.org.au