

Travelling and holidays with dementia



This booklet features information, tips and strategies about travelling and going on holidays. Please read and share it with your family, friends and carers.

The information in this booklet has been based on input and discussions with people impacted by dementia. We acknowledge and are grateful for each contributor generously sharing their time, experience and knowledge.

It is important to remember everyone living with dementia is unique. The content in this booklet is general in nature and we recommend you seek professional advice in relation to any specific concerns or issues you may have.

For further information and enquiries please contact:

National Dementia Helpline
1800 100 500

Find us online
dementia.org.au

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Foreword

Why this guide may be helpful

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

Dementia Australia developed this guide for people with dementia, their families, carers and friends, as well as for health professionals.

Read about the key considerations for travelling and holidaying when living with dementia, and ways to have an enjoyable holiday.

Although every effort has been made to ensure the content of this guide is relevant to all parts of Australia, we advise you to check with local authorities for specific details and possible variations.

How might having dementia affect the way you take holidays?

Going on holidays can be enjoyable for you, your family and carers. It can offer a break from routine and the opportunity for new experiences. If you used to love travelling alone, this may become more difficult over time. You may need to find new ways to enjoy holidays together.



We didn't think making our Hawaiian holiday dream a reality was possible, but guidance from our doctor and the counsellor at Dementia Australia helped us prepare.

It wasn't always easy, but it is now one of my fondest memories. ”





Planning holidays with dementia

Living with dementia does not mean you cannot travel. Travelling can be stressful and challenging but it can also be a very rewarding experience. Planning ahead can help ensure you have the best possible experience.

If you are a first-time traveller, planning with a trusted and recommended travel agent may be a good idea. Booking a holiday package, with many of the travel arrangements pre-booked can help reduce the stress of travelling.

It's also worth exploring online travel forums and blogs for travel advice specific to your chosen location.

Being aware of capabilities and possible challenges can help with your decision about going on holidays, and can assist you in deciding where you want to go, and what you might do whilst you are travelling.

Things to consider before planning your holiday:

- How does your experience of living with dementia impact on you?

- Can you complete daily living activities on your own, or with the help of a family member or friend?

- How will you respond to changes in routine and environment?

- What is the capacity of your travelling companion to support you without the assistance of other usual support networks?

- Can you or your travel companion manage well if a crisis arises?

- Are you, or the person travelling with you, prepared to adjust travel plans should your needs change mid-trip?

Signs that travelling and holidays may not be suitable for you:

- If you regularly feel disorientation, confusion or agitation, even in familiar settings.

- If you regularly feel that you want to go back home, even when you are away from home on short visits.

- If you have incontinence problems.

- If you are unable to walk safely or for longer distances.

- If you feel angry or anxious when your needs are not met, which sometimes causes you to have physical or emotional responses.

- If you have an existing predisposition to falls or a high risk of falling.

- If you have other unstable medical conditions.

If you are unsure whether travelling is a good idea, seek the advice of your healthcare professional.

Begin planning

Some things to consider when planning your holiday.

Medical clearance

- Consult with your doctor to see if your travel plans are suitable for your situation.
- Some airlines, cruise ship operators and insurance providers may ask for written medical clearance from your doctor.
- Check whether you can take prescription medications on your trip. You may need to purchase extra medication if you plan to be away for an extended time.

Time and duration

- The time of year, season and duration of the trip are all important factors.
- Consider trialling a short domestic holiday before doing a longer or international trip.
- Avoid travelling at peak travel seasons, such as Christmas.
- Be prepared to allow plenty of time for everything.
- Plan to travel at the time of day when you are usually at your best.



Book in advance

- Booking ahead can help ensure that accessible accommodation, special assistance and transport options are available. It also provides you with time to prepare for your trip.

Communications

- If you are travelling overseas, explore options for a mobile phone plan with international roaming and save important telephone numbers to your mobile phone.
- Download and practise using messenger apps, so you have quick and easy access to your support networks while you are away.

Medication

- Pack a first aid kit. Include all medications you may need while you are away. Also include medication that may help with stomach upsets, diarrhoea, urinary tract infections or other temporary problems caused by changes in environment and food.
- Medication packs and dispensers can help you organise and keep track of medication.
- Keep medication in carry-on luggage in case checked luggage is lost or delayed.
- Bring prescriptions and additional medication. This can be helpful if your medication gets lost, runs out, or if you decide to extend your trip.
- Prepare a list of all medications and dosages in case you become unwell.
- A letter from your GP or specialist detailing diagnosis and medications used is a good idea when travelling to countries with stringent drug laws.

Identification

- Consider wearing a disease identification bracelet and have some form of identification on you at all times. This could be a photocopy of your passport, driver's licence, or other identification card.
- Keep the details of your accommodation and a contact number with you when holidaying in places unfamiliar to you.
- If you're travelling in a non-English speaking country, consider making cue cards with "dementia" printed in the local languages.

Travel insurance

- Travel insurance is very important. It can cover losses, damage and some unexpected costs that may occur during your travels.
- Some insurance company guidelines may require you to disclose a dementia diagnosis.
- Be sure to read the policy carefully to ensure it covers exactly what you need.
- Having dementia may mean that you will be declined insurance coverage, possibly face higher premiums, or not be covered for certain risks.

While on holidays

New environments can sometimes be confusing and difficult to adapt to. There are strategies you can use to prevent or manage challenges.

Maintain routine

Try to keep mealtimes, bedtimes, and medication schedules as close to home routine as possible to help reduce stress and anxiety.

Writing the routine down might be helpful for you or your travel companion to have something to refer to.

Travel tips for your companion

- Ensure the person with dementia is well informed of where you are going and what you will be doing. Try not to overload them with complicated or excess information.
- Having your itinerary on hand for reference can be helpful.

Know the warning signs

- Learn to recognise the warning signs of anxiety and agitation in yourself.
- Expect increased confusion, agitation and behavioural changes during your trip and have a plan for managing this.

Enjoy

- Holidays are a fantastic opportunity to make memories and have fun. Take lots of photos and notes as these will be useful to support reminiscing when you return home.
- Keep your sense of humour when things don't go to plan. Holidays always have highs and lows. They will be part of your experience.



“

Our travel agent was great. She offered us the professional advice and flexibility that we needed and provided us with easy to read maps and instructions for public transport. ”

Travelling by sea

With so many ports of call around the world and a large range of activities to interest people of all ages, cruising is a popular holiday option.



My mother has dementia, but her life continues to be enriched with fulfilment. We went on a cruise last year that provided us with uninterrupted time, gave me some time to relax and just be there for my mum while our needs were taken care of.

It was difficult at times, but so rewarding to have shared this time together. ”

There are several factors to consider before planning a cruise.

Duration

For first time cruisers, a three to four-night cruise may be a good way of finding out if cruising is for you. If all goes well, longer trips may be considered.

The vessel

Cruise ships are large vessels that can often become difficult to navigate. To help reduce confusion, choose a room close to easy-to-find reference points or an elevator. It can be useful to look at online traveller reviews about particular cruises to make the most appropriate choice for your age and lifestyle.



Inform staff

Some cruise ships are designed to accommodate people with moderate physical disabilities. It is always best to state your needs upfront so that the staff can best assist you.

Informing staff can also help with priority boarding and extra assistance at embarkation and disembarkation points. Also, you could discreetly inform your room steward of your situation, because these staff members can be very helpful.

Book in advance

Booking in advance may help ensure that the room type and location you need is available. Consider booking a cabin in a class where extra concierge help is available.

Be prepared to limit shore excursions to short and simple ones that bring you back to the ship well before departure time.

Travelling by air

Whether your holiday is domestic or overseas, flying is the fastest way to get to where you are going. However, airports and aircrafts can be noisy and confusing environments. Some helpful tips when planning travel by air include:

Ask for help

- Request boarding assistance when booking flights, for easy passage through all phases of travel.
- Explain that you, or your travel companion, may not understand or follow instructions well. This can help reduce stress, particularly with the crowds and technology around security and border control.

Be prepared

- Many people find it difficult to sleep on long-haul flights. Supportive stockings and/or a neck pillow can help make you more comfortable. When you are on the aircraft, you can also request a blanket from the flight crew.
- Well before your trip, consider talking to your doctor about how medication may help.

Packing

- Pack all essential items into your carry-on luggage that can help you to feel comfortable. This includes items such as a full set of clothes and enough medications in case your flight is delayed or if your checked luggage is lost.
- When possible, check luggage all the way through to your final destination.
- Music players and noise cancelling headphones may help you tune out extra noise.
- Pack snacks. They may provide a diversion if you are prone to agitation.
- Pre-booking in-flight entertainment, or pack an activity of interest to help reduce anxiety or agitation.



Identification

- Consider wearing a medical alert identification bracelet at all times, recording flight and contact information.
- Carry travel information in your wallet: name, address, and phone number of your holiday address, as well as any stopover information.
- In case of emergency, have copies of passports and visas in your carry-on luggage.

Allow plenty of time

- Allow enough time before flights to complete all the pre-boarding steps without rushing. However, allowing too much time may increase the risk of anxiety or disorientation.

Stay hydrated

- Aircraft cabins can be extremely dry, making it easy for dehydration to occur. Drink plenty of water on the plane and afterwards.

Travelling by car

Things to consider when travelling by car:

Comfort

- Make yourself comfortable in your seat. Make sure your seatbelt is not too tight or restrictive.
- Plan your trip outside of peak periods to minimise travelling time.
- Review the availability of public toilets along your route. The Australian Government's public toilet map ([toiletmap.gov.au](https://www.toiletmap.gov.au)) helps you find toilets on your journey. Planning in advance where you might like to stop can be helpful.
- Play games along the way, or take snacks to eat.

Safety

- Where possible, engage the safety lock to prevent accidentally opening the car door. Be aware of safety when getting out of the car, especially when parking near traffic.
- Do not get in the car if you are feeling stressed or anxious. Let your travel companion know: this may impact on their ability to drive safely and effectively.

Travelling by public transport

Plan ahead

- Check train and bus timetables prior to journey.
- Purchasing tickets in advance (wherever possible) can help with navigating busy train stations and unfamiliar bus routes.
- If travelling by bus, let the driver know where you need to go, so you don't miss your stop.

Be prepared

- Carry trip details and personal information with you in case you become unsure of where to go.
- Carry details with you, such as your home address, destination and emergency contacts.
- If setting off on a longer journey, take plenty of things to enjoy with your travel companion, such as games, photo albums and puzzles, as well as snacks and drinks.
- Choosing seats close to the bus driver or near the doors in a train carriage can help make getting off easier.

Ask for help

- Ask for help if you are unsure about where to go. Bus drivers and staff at train stations are there to help. Transport staff can be easily identified by their uniforms or the high visibility vests they often wear.

Have a companion

- Using public transport alone can be stressful. Travelling with someone can make it easier.
- A companion can help you ensure that the bus stops at the right point or that the person disembarks at the right train station.



Accommodation

Here are a few tips to plan for your stay in accommodation new to you:

Location

- Book accommodation that's easy to find and get to via public transport.

Notify hotel staff

- Notify staff that you have dementia. Stating your needs upfront allows staff to better assist you.

Hotel rooms

- Most hotels offer accessible rooms which may be more comfortable and dementia-friendly.

Bathrooms

- Consider keeping the bathroom door propped open so that the toilet is clearly visible, cover mirrors and keep the light on at night.

Upon your return

Allow yourself time to settle in

Allow a few days to settle back into the routine of things. If you can, try to avoid scheduling too many events in the days following your return. Make sure you eat well and drink plenty of water.

Visit your doctor

Schedule an appointment with your doctor to debrief about the trip, your health and wellbeing.

Useful information and contacts

Smart Traveller

1300 555 135 (from within Australia)
+61 2 6261 3305 (from overseas)

Cruise Critic

Website providing information and reviews about cruising all over the world. It provides a forum for people to discuss issues and find advice.

TripAdvisor

Website providing customer reviews and travel related information.

Carers Australia

Provides information and resources for carers. The Carer Supports and Services line operates Monday to Friday between 9am and 5pm and can put carers in touch with a range of services and supports.

Free call: 1800 242 636

Reduced Mobility Rights

Website which advocates for delivering customer service excellence to passengers with special needs who travel by air. They have a dedicated page for 'Air Travel Tips - Flying with Dementia'.

National Dementia Helpline

The Helpline Advisors can assist you with information, support and advice about all forms of dementia and related issues – no question is too small.

The Helpline is available 8am to 8pm across Australia, Monday to Friday excluding national public holidays. **Phone: 1800 100 500**

You can also contact the Helpline by email:
helpline@dementia.org.au

About Dementia Australia

Dementia Australia is the source of trusted information, education and services for the estimated half a million Australians living with dementia, and the almost 1.6 million people involved in their care.

We advocate for positive change and support vital research. We are here to support people impacted by dementia, and to enable them to live as well as possible.

Founded by carers more than 35 years ago, today we are the national peak body for people living with dementia, their families and carers. We involve people impacted by dementia and their experiences in our activities and decision-making, to make sure we are representative of the diverse range of dementia experiences. We amplify the voices of people impacted by dementia through advocating and sharing stories to help inform and inspire others.

No matter how you are impacted by dementia, we are here for you.

National Dementia Helpline

1800 100 500



For language assistance
call **131 450**

Find us online

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