

Has someone you know gone missing?

Information for carers of people living with dementia

Factsheet no.13

People living with dementia are especially at risk if they go missing. They may find themselves in an unfamiliar situation and feel confused and frightened. Their condition makes them especially vulnerable and they may be unable to seek help, so it is important that you act as soon as you realise the person you care for has gone missing.

People living with dementia are at risk of 'wandering' because in their own mind, they are looking for something. This may be a familiar person, a familiar place or something to eat. They may think they need to fulfil former obligations such as going to work. This is known as 'purposeful wandering'. Others may 'wander' at random, which may seem to have no purpose – maybe they were attracted by something that took their interest, but they then become distracted to another purpose.

Whether purposeful or not, a person living with dementia who is 'wandering' is at risk of getting lost because they become disorientated, agitated and/or anxious, or because they just continue walking. Once lost, they are in increased danger of serious harm from falls, lack of food and drink, accidents and exposure.

What to do if the person you care for goes missing

As soon as you discover the person you care for has gone missing and you cannot

find them, call the police on 999. People living with dementia who go missing are treated as high priority by police, due to their vulnerability.



The police will be able to start searching for the missing person straight away, but they will need some information from you when you first call them. This includes:

- The full name and date of birth of the person who has gone missing
- A description of the person who has gone missing – hair colour, height, clothing and any items they may have such as a walking stick
- Where you last saw them and what they were doing/intending to do
- Details of any places you think they may go to

- If they have taken their vehicle, details of the make, model, colour and number plate
- Details of the severity of their dementia and how this affects them, e.g., if they become frightened when approached by strangers
- Have they gone missing before (even if this wasn't reported to police) and if so, where they were found

With this information, the police control room can pass these details to officers on patrol, who can start looking for the missing person.

A police officer will then come and visit you to find out more information about the person who has gone missing. It is helpful if you can give them any of the following information:

- A recent photograph of the missing person
- Details of any medication they need and whether they have this with them
- Any other names they may be known by, e.g. a maiden name or a nickname
- Details of any places they have previously lived or frequented, such as a previous place of work, pubs, favourite holiday or leisure destinations or graveyards where relatives are buried
- A list of the names, addresses and phone numbers of friends and relatives - even if they are not local
- Any interests they have - horses, railways, football, for example.

This extra information will help police with their search. It is important to act quickly and give police as much information as possible. The longer a person living with

dementia is missing for, the greater the risk of harm.

Reducing the risk of harm

Keep a file

If the person you care for is at risk of 'wandering' and going missing, it is useful to take some preparatory steps to help police find them quickly.

Having information ready to hand is especially useful. You could put together a file containing information about the person living with dementia which you can hand to police. If you have a computer, keep a file, including a recent photograph, saved on your hard drive, so that you can email information to the police Control Room if requested. Some police forces have equipped officers with palmtop computers or Personal Digital Assistants (PDA) and a photograph of the missing person can be sent to the officers on patrol.

To help you with creating an information file about the person living with dementia, there are some leaflets and forms that you can download from the websites of charities and organisations with an interest in the condition. Useful sites include:

Alzheimer's Society - download the leaflet *This is me* at:

http://www.alzheimers.org.uk/site/scripts/download_info.php?fileID=849

Age UK has a free *Lifebook* where important and useful information can be recorded. This can be ordered from the website at:

<http://www.ageuk.org.uk/home-and-care/home-safety-and-security/lifebook/> or by phone on 0845 685 1061, quoting reference ALL 721

Dementia UK is developing a project called Life Story Work. A template for a Life Story Book can be downloaded at: <http://www.dementiauk.org/information-support/life-story-work/>



Whichever way you create a file on the person living with dementia, remember to include the following information which is of most use to police in the early stages of a search:

- A recent photograph
- Full name and date of birth – include any maiden names and nicknames they like to be known by
- A full description including height, build, hair and eye colour. Remember to include details such as whether they wear glasses or have any distinguishing features such as tattoos or scars, even if these are normally hidden from view
- Details of any medication they are on and any medical needs
- Details of their doctor and any clinics or support groups they attend
- Note down whether they use a walking stick, walk in a certain manner or behave in a certain way, such as avoiding contact with people they don't know – anything

that makes them stand out in a crowd is useful for police officers to know

- Information about places of significance – this may include previous addresses, previous places of work, places of worship, cemeteries where relatives are buried or favourite places to spend their free time
- Details of any hobbies or interests, for example railways, aircraft, animals or sports.

Keep your file up-to-date and record any changes such as new medication or changes in appearance. If the person has a history of going 'wandering'/missing, note down the details of where they were found and how they got there – this information can help police in planning their searches.

Devices which can help

A number of different devices are available which aim to prevent people getting lost. These include:

- **Movement-activated voice alerts** which are placed at the approach to a doorway. These devices contain infra-red motion detectors and when movement is sensed, a voice message is triggered, for example: 'Go back to bed Mum, it's night time'
- **Door alarms** which make a loud noise when a door is opened
- **Object locators** which emit a beep when a tag is separated from its base unit (e.g. the person living with dementia carrying the tag wanders away from their carer, who carries the receiver)
- **Activity monitors and recorders** where infra red sensors and a web interface provide a real-time chart of activity to help plan support

- **Personal GPS locator** carried by the person with dementia which can text it's location to a call centre or the carer's phone
- **GPS location by a smart phone** carried by the person with dementia. The phone needs to be charged and GPS-enabled
- **Simple mobile phone** which has just a few pre-programmed buttons, including a SOS button.

More information about the devices listed above, as well as other monitoring services such as telecare services, can be obtained from any of the organisations listed at the end of this factsheet.

When they return

When the person who has gone missing returns home, try not to tell them off or show that you are worried. If they were lost, they may be feeling anxious themselves and seeing that you are upset may make them feel even worse. Reassure them and get them back into a familiar routine as soon as possible.



Walking can help relieve stress and boredom and provide exercise for people with dementia, but it can be worrying for those who live with and care for them and can sometimes put them in danger. It is important to find a solution that preserves their dignity and independence.

The charity Alzheimer's Society has a factsheet called *Moving and Walking About* which has some useful tips on how to ensure the safety of the person with dementia whilst retaining their dignity and independence. This can be downloaded at http://www.alzheimers.org.uk/site/scripts/document_pdf.php?documentID=152, or can be obtained by phoning or writing to Alzheimer's Society using the contact details listed below.

Further sources of information and support

The following charities and organisations can provide further information and support for people living with dementia and their carers. There are also numerous local organisations, day centres and volunteer groups, details of which can be found by searching on the internet or in your local phone directory.

Alzheimer's Society offers support to people living with dementia and their carers.

Alzheimer's Society
Devon House
58 St Katharine's Way
London E1W 1LB
Website: <http://www.alzheimers.org.uk/>
Telephone helpline: 0300 222 11 22

Age UK aims to improve later-life support for everyone by providing life-enhancing services and vital support.

Age UK
Tavis House
1-6 Tavistock Square
London
WC1H 9NA
Website: <http://www.ageuk.org.uk>

Telephone: 0800 169 6565

Dementia UK works to improve the quality of life of all people affected by dementia. Services include specialist nurses, carer training and a support network for carers, family and friends of people living with dementia.

Dementia UK
6 Camden High Street,
London
N1 0JH
Website: <http://www.dementiauk.org/>
Telephone: 0207 874 7200

Alzheimer Scotland helps people with dementia, their families and carers.

Alzheimer Scotland
22 Drumsheugh Gardens
Edinburgh
EH3 7RN
Website: <http://www.alzscot.org/>
24 hour Dementia Helpline: 0808 808 3000

Carers Direct provides information, advice and support for carers.

Website:
<http://www.nhs.uk/carersdirect/Pages/CarersDirectHome.aspx>
Telephone: 0808 802 0202

For additional copies, to enquire about the content of this document or to request the information in an alternative format, please contact the UK Missing Persons Bureau on **0845 000 5481** or email: missingpersons bureau@nca.x.gsi.gov.uk

The information in this guide is not definitive and should be utilised in conjunction with police guidance and independent legal advice.

If you require more information, other factsheets can be downloaded from the MPB website: <http://missingpersons.police.uk>