

Tips for Traveling with a Loved One with Dementia



Planning ahead

- Have a bag of essentials with you at all times that includes medications, travel itinerary, a comfortable change of clothes, water, snacks and activities.
- Pack necessary medications, up-to-date medical information, a list of emergency contacts and photocopies of important legal documents.
- Create an itinerary that includes details about each destination. Give copies to emergency contacts at home. Keep a copy of your itinerary with you at all times.
- If you will be staying in a hotel, inform the staff ahead of time of your specific needs so they can be prepared to assist you.
- Travel during the time of day that is best for the person with dementia.

When does it make more sense to stay home?

Traveling is usually a lot easier when the person is in the earlier stages of dementia. Here are some useful tips to help you decide if staying at home makes more sense.

Does the person

- become anxious or agitated in new environments or around new people?
- constantly ask to go home even during short visits or trips?
- act verbally or physically abusive?
- have a problem with continence?
- wander?
- have great difficulty walking or have a risk of falling?
- need help with things like dressing, going to the bathroom, bathing, eating?
- have other serious medical issues and/or need a physician's ok to travel?

Travel tips

- If the trip is a go and it's going to be a long ride in the car, consider taking some short trips ahead of time to troubleshoot potential problems.
- Honor the person's usual schedule and stick to it as much as possible. Routine is critical, so if it is disrupted, expect there to be some agitation or increased confusion.
- Bring along familiar items, especially things that are soothing for the person: soft comfort items, special activities, books, pictures or favorite scented lotions. Be sure clothing is comfortable.
- Always allow for extra time.
- People with dementia often have better times of the day; try to schedule activities (driving, for instance) during those better times when the person is rested, fed and comfortable.
- Don't try to pack too much into one day. It may make more sense to break up a long drive with an overnight stay along the way. Rest can be critical (for both of you).
- Make sure the person is carrying or wearing some form of identification that includes your cell phone number. Kate Fallon, a licensed clinical professional counselor at Ageless Journeys, says a Safe Return bracelet is a great option.
- Take a photograph of your loved one so you'll know what clothes he/she is wearing ... just in case. In fact, take pictures along the way so you can document your trip and enjoy looking at them later.
- Carry all important documents yourself — tickets, passports, etc.
- In the airport, use family or handicapped restrooms if you're concerned about your person using it alone and be cautious about letting him/her wait outside when you're using the restroom.
- On the plane, try to get a seat close to the restroom.
- If you have special needs, let the airline know. Consider letting the flight attendants know you are traveling with someone who has dementia. (use companion cards to alert individuals discreetly)
- Carry as few bags as possible or have them checked straight through.
- Breathe
- Smile even if you don't feel like it. It's amazing how quickly a smile can turn things around

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Bring an Ipod, mp3 player, or phone loaded with your loved one's favorite music and a pair of comfortable headphones

