
Safe At Home With Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias (ARD)

Dealing with wandering behaviours

Home safety concerns related to the cognitive and behavioural symptoms of ARD, especially wandering, are particularly worrisome to caregivers. The following 'Skills for the job of Living' suggestions will help to create a safe and secure environment for your loved one:

- Register with the National Alzheimer Wandering Registry. This is a national service developed by the Alzheimer Society of Canada with the RCMP. Vital personal information is stored on a confidential police database. If the person should wander, this information can be accessed by police anywhere in Canada. For a one-time fee of \$25, the Alzheimer Society provides a medic alert bracelet, a Caregiver Handbook, and ID bracelet. For more information, contact your local Alzheimer ' organization or call 1-800-616-8816.

Wandering is a behaviour that can be helped somewhat by the way we care for our loved ones.

- Support the emotional need behind the person's wish for experiences such as going to work or finding one's mother by talking about those things with the wanderer.
- Provide an accepting environment that encourages staying in one place and provides an "emotional shelter".
- Provide a safety-proofed area for pacing and wandering in the home or yard.
- Put away coat, boots, and other items that may cue the person to go out.

- Talk to neighbours and local stores about your concerns, taking a photo as necessary, so that others may contact the caregiver if the person wanders off. This

Home modifications help decrease wandering without the person feeling like a prisoner.

can provide an excellent opportunity to educate others about ARD.

- Have the person wear an identification bracelet or necklace with caregiver contact information. Presenting this as a special gift can encourage it to be used.
- Secure the doors - disguised in a way that won't frustrate the person and lead to a sense of being locked in. The following are some suggestions:

Extra locks - slide bars or deadbolts, at the top and bottom, camouflaged to blend into the surroundings. For safety reasons, these devices must also be easily managed by the caregiver.

Childproof door handle covers - (available at toy stores or children's departments).

Camouflage the whole doorway with fabric, painting, or artwork (e.g. a mural which includes the door, frame, and surrounding wall).

Alarm systems which can be simple (e.g. bells on the door handle or above the door or an inexpensive welcome mat that plays a tune when stepped on) or complex, that will signal when the person is leaving. (see over)

Occupational Therapy

Skills for the job of living.

- Keep a current picture of the person for identification if she/he should wander off.
- Keep a couple of unlaundered items of personal clothing in a plastic bag in the freezer. These can be used by tracking dogs for scent identification.

Wandering into areas of the home where there are safety risks or where the person may disrupt the activity of other family members is also a concern. Some of the following suggestions may help:

- Provide stimulating sitting or “work areas where the person will be cued to stay and to do things.
- Provide plenty of exercise and stimulation during the day so the person feels ready to rest at home during the evening.
- Use half-doors in areas such as the kitchen or bedroom, so that the person can still look in or out at other family members.
- Fabric “cues” in a bright colour, velcroed across certain doorways, may be enough to cue the person where or where not to go. Note that childrens’ safety gates, especially around stairs, are not recommended as the person usually sees these as an unnatural obstacle and may try to climb over and subsequently fall.

Finding an occupational therapist to help at home

Occupational therapy services for home-related problems can be accessed through many methods, including:

- Home Care programs through your regional health authority
- Extended health benefits with some insurers
- Veterans Affairs for eligible veterans
- Clients purchasing services directly from an occupational therapist

To find an occupational therapist go to our website at www.saot.ca and download the Private Practice Listing. Or for an occupational therapist employed by a regional health authority, phone Health Link, or go to the Inform Alberta website (www.informalberta.ca).

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of Canada. (1998). Living at home with Alzheimer’s disease and related dementias: A manual of resources, references, and information. Ottawa, ON. Adapted with permission of CAOT, ©CAOT Publications ACE.



Occupational therapy assists you with the Skills for the job of living in caring for yourself and your family, in returning to work, and in resuming community activities.

For additional information of the benefits of occupational therapy and how it can assist you or someone you know, please contact:

info@saot.ca

www.saot.ca or www.otworks.com