

Has someone you know gone missing? Information for carers of people living with dementia

Factsheet 13

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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 goal-driven 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 easily become distracted to another purpose.

Whether goal-driven or not, a person living with dementia who is wandering is at risk of getting lost because they become disorientated, restless, agitated and/or anxious. Once lost, they are in increased danger of injury or death from falls, 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

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:

The Alzheimer's Society - download the leaflet *This is me* at:
[https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/info/20113/publications/about_living_with_dementia/415/this_is_me'](https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/info/20113/publications/about_living_with_dementia/415/this_is_me)

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 0345 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.

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.

Further sources of information and support

Alzheimer's Society

Offers support to people living with dementia and their carers.

Telephone: **0300 222 11 22**

Website: www.alzheimers.org.uk/

Alzheimer Scotland

Helps people with dementia, their families and carers in Scotland. They also run a 24 hour Dementia Helpline.

Dementia Helpline: **0808 808 3000**

Website: www.alzscot.org

Age UK

Aims to improve later-life support for everyone by providing life-enhancing services and vital support.

Telephone: **0800 169 6565**

Website: www.ageuk.org.uk

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.

Telephone: **0800 888 6678**

Website: www.dementiauk.org

Carers Direct

Provides information, advice and support for carers.

Telephone: **0300 123 1053**

Website: <http://www.nhs.uk/carersdirect/Pages/CarersDirectHome.aspx>

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

To enquire about the content of this document or request the information in an alternative format, please contact the UK Missing Persons Unit on 0800 234 6034 or email ukmpu@nca.gov.uk

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