

# Travelling

This help sheet provides information for families and carers about travelling with someone with dementia. It lists some warning signs for when travel may be inappropriate and some helpful suggestions for planning a trip and for travelling.

## Travelling with a person who has dementia

Many families and carers have happy and fulfilling times travelling with a person with dementia. Trips can include overseas and interstate travel and can be for reminiscence, family gatherings, sightseeing, or relocation to a different care situation.

However travelling with a person who has dementia can present a number of hazards and challenges. It is usually better to travel in the early stages of the illness, as further down the track the person may become too disoriented, agitated or distressed.

Although people with dementia generally do best in well-ordered, familiar and stable settings, travel can be successful given the right conditions and some thoughtful planning.

## Warning signs against travel

- Consistent disorientation, agitation in familiar settings
- Wanting to go home when away from home on short visits
- Delusional, paranoid, aggressive or dis-inhibited behaviour
- Problems managing continence
- Teary, anxious or withdrawn in crowded, noisy settings
- Agitated or wandering behaviour

If any of these signs are present it may mean that travel is not a good idea. If the travel is unavoidable it would be advisable to consult a specialist to explore whether medication may be useful to settle the person. Providing a familiar and reassuring companion is the first consideration.

If none of the signs are present, it may still be useful to undertake a trial by taking a short trip using the type of transport that is planned for the longer trip. This will help establish the person's travel capacity. It will also give a good idea of whether to pursue the original plan or not.

## **Travelling by air or sea**

When planning a trip it is important to seek specialist advice well in advance of departure and to develop contingency plans for unexpected diversions or cancellation of your trip.

### **Considerations**

- Build in flexibility and stopovers to enable the person with dementia to adjust gradually to time differences
- Ask for help: Request assistance when booking flights or cruises. Doing so can provide easy passage through all phases of boarding and emigration.
- A music player and noise cancelling headphones may be a good way of tuning out extra noise. Packing snacks may provide a diversion if the person with dementia is prone to agitation.
- Identification: Encourage the person with dementia to wear an identification bracelet at all times. Recording contact information on the bracelet or in their wallet/purse can help the person with dementia be reunited with you if they separate.
- Allow plenty of time to investigate the best travel insurance policy for the situation

## **Travelling by car**

### **Considerations**

- Comfort: Check that the person is comfortable in the seat. Make sure the seatbelt is not too tight or restrictive.
- Safety: Where possible, engage the safety lock to prevent accidental opening of the car door. Be aware of their safety when getting out of the car, especially when parking near traffic.
- Do not get in the car if you are worried that the current stress and anxiety levels of the person living with dementia may impact on your ability to drive safely and effectively.

## **Tips for families and carers when travelling with someone with dementia**

- Be prepared to do everything for two. This can be taxing, so try to get plenty of rest before the trip
- Encourage the person with dementia to wear an identification bracelet at all times. Also make sure that the following information is in their wallet or purse: name, address and phone number of your holiday address as well as any stopovers. Mark all clothing with their name
- You need to hold all important possessions such as passports, money, schedules and tickets
- Take a list of important contacts such as doctors and family
- Remember to take enough medications to cover the period of travel as well as prescriptions
- Take a list of recent and current medications, which may be helpful if the person with dementia becomes unwell
- Always ask for assistance. People cannot help if they don't know there is a problem
- Be aware of large toilet blocks that have more than one entry or exit point. Consider where possible using disabled or family toilets where there is more space and you can remain together
- If you feel it is appropriate, notify the airline that someone with dementia will be flying with them. Most airlines will be very helpful
- If necessary, ask for assistance from cabin staff when the person needs to use the toilet. Requesting seating close to the toilet can help to avoid long walks
- Consider if requesting an aisle seat may be helpful
- If possible, check the luggage all the way through to your final destination. Luggage with wheels is helpful, or invest in a lightweight suitcase
- Take a minimum of clothing. But remember to take a change of clothes on the plane
- If staying in a hotel and wandering is a problem, lock the door to the room with the safety latch. Consider a portable door alarm that goes off if disturbed

- Leave the bathroom light on all night
- Unfamiliar taps and knobs can be very confusing for a person with dementia. Make sure that you turn the shower on and adjust the water temperature
- Keep a sense of humour and laugh at the funny things that happen along the way
- Allow plenty of time for everything

Adapted from **Alberta Perspective** – October 1991

### **Further information**

For further information on travelling, please see the Dementia Australia booklet ‘Travelling and Holidays with dementia’  
[dementia.org.au/Travelling-with-dementia.pdf](https://dementia.org.au/Travelling-with-dementia.pdf)

### **Further Information**

Dementia Australia offers support, information, education and counselling. Contact the National Dementia Helpline on **1800 100 500**, or visit our website at [dementia.org.au](https://dementia.org.au)



For language assistance phone the Translating and Interpreting Service on **131 450**