

Traveling with Someone with Dementia

At some point, traveling with your loved one who has dementia may not be possible. Talk with your doctor and service providers as well as your family prior to planning a trip. Here are some tips for traveling.

- **Keep things as familiar as possible.** Travel during the day when you are normally awake. Keep meal times as close to normal as possible. Make sure your loved one has items that are familiar such as a favorite pair of pajamas or a favorite tea before bed.
- **Be prepared.** Be sure to carry your Power of Attorney (POA) if you have one. Get plenty of rest before the trip. Allow extra time for everything...bathing, dressing, packing, getting to the airport. Wear comfortable clothing. Bring a brief medical history and enough medication for your trip. Bring a change of clothing in case of accidents. Carry hand wipes for any spills. Avoid caffeine. Bring along cards that indicate your loved one has dementia to hand out if needed.
- **Identification needs.** Be sure your loved one has a copy of your itinerary and your contact information on their person at all times in case you and your loved one get separated. Consider an id bracelet or necklace with alert information.
- **Create a travel bag.** Include items that are meaningful and familiar to your loved one that you use to distract or redirect at home; items of comfort and/or of entertainment, such as a book of pictures or poems, a stuffed animal, airline-approved snacks, a scarf, or a small photo album.
- **Plan your itinerary well in advance.** Make sure you have plenty of time between layovers if layovers are needed. Make sure family and friends know what to expect and what helps your loved one feel calm and safe. Minimize time spent in large, noisy groups if possible.
- **Be realistic.** Carefully assess what your loved one's limitations and strengths are as well as your own. If possible, have a travel companion to accompany you and your loved one. Consult with your physician and see if he or she recommends a medication for the trip.

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- **Limit the length of a plane or car ride.** If your trip is a long one, a layover for a good night's sleep may be needed to stay on normal time. Sleep deprivation can cause disorientation and confusion which can then lead to agitation. Travel during normal "awake" hours, as much as possible.
- **If you are driving** and the person with dementia becomes agitated, pull over. Do not try to calm him or her while you are driving. He or she may become more agitated and try to leave a moving car if judgment is impaired.
- **If you are traveling by air** notify the airline when making your reservations to request gate-to-gate assistance. Be prepared to advocate for needed additional accommodations. Consider paying for the TSA Pre-Check. Try to avoid layovers in busy airports or use non-stop flights. If your loved one is restless, plan to sit in the aisle seat so you are aware if he/she tries to get up. Try to be seated near a restroom. Bring all medications with you on the plane, not in your checked luggage. Talk with attendants about your loved one's condition.
- **If you are staying in a hotel,** you may want to notify hotel staff that you are traveling with a loved one who is living with dementia. This would be a good time to use the small cards alerting staff about your loved one. Request a childproof doorknob cover or see if the hotel has a latch on the door if your loved one wanders. Request a room away from conference rooms or elevators where things tend to be noisier.
- **Have a backup plan.** Recognize when you or your loved one is becoming confused or frustrated. Consider a time out, take some deep breaths, and modify activities you are doing. It may be necessary to get some rest. Remember that you can shorten your trip or change your plans if needed.