

Walking safely

Walking is good for your health and keeps you active and connected with other people.

If you've been diagnosed with dementia, you don't need to stop walking. You might just need to make some changes to stay safe, and make sure you don't get lost.

Dementia can affect your ability to walk safely. You might:

- become lost or disoriented more easily
- not recognise your home, roads or traffic
- not recognise signs and other cues to cross roads safely
- not have a clear sense of distance and time
- walk for long periods without stopping, even if you're tired, hungry or thirsty.

But there are a few things you can do to stay safe, avoid becoming lost, get home if you're lost.

Planning ahead

Make a plan to help people find you if you get lost. It should include:

- your contact details
- recent photos of you (including a head shot and a full-length photo)
- a list of people (family members, friends or neighbours) who can help look for you, and their contact details
- information about your walking routine
- details about your earlier life, job, hobbies and favourite places.

Make sure your friends and family know about the plan. Let them know they might be contacted.

Identification

Clear identification can help you get home as quickly as possible if you get lost. Some options include:

- labelling your clothes, shoes and wallet with your name, contact details and contact details of a family member or friend
- wearing a MedicAlert bracelet, or an engraved identity bracelet with your details
- carrying your own personalised kit with important information.

You could attach this to your mobile phone providing local police with a recent photo of yourself and letting them know your walking routine.

Walking safely

If you're going for a walk, there are some things you can do to keep yourself safe.

Involve other people

Ask a friend or family member to walk with you, or join a walking group.

If you're walking on your own, leave a note at home in an obvious spot. Or contact someone to tell them where you're going and when you think you'll return.

Consider asking family, friends and neighbours to check if you're okay when they see you out on your own.

Visit familiar, safe places

Have a routine of walks and places you visit. Take a similar route on your walks.

If you're walking with someone else, ask them to gently redirect you if you become disoriented.

Walk during the day when other people are about.

Choose walking routes that are safer and less complex to navigate. For example, choose routes away from main roads, in residential areas or parks, and are on level ground and well lit. If busy or noisy places are hard to cope with, avoid them or visit during quieter times of the day.

Wear comfortable shoes

Choose shoes that fit well, are comfortable and are difficult to remove.

Use memory aids

Keep a notebook and pen with you to write down memory prompts.

Try to park your car in the same spot each time, or photograph the location.

Use the map on your phone for directions.

Tracking devices

Personal tracking devices show your current location, helping to make sure you can be found quickly if you become lost. They're not perfect,

but they can give you, and the people who support you, peace of mind when you're walking alone.

There's a wide variety of tracking devices on the market. You may choose to wear a transmitter or device, or use an app on your mobile phone.

If you choose to wear a transmitter or device, look for one that is:

- small, light, inconspicuous and difficult to remove
- simple to operate
- robust and reliable, with a good battery life
- accurate (within 10 metres).

The [National Equipment Database](#) (NED) has information about personal tracking devices.

Tips for care-givers

It's normal to feel worried if your friend or family member with dementia likes to walk outside. But it's good for them to keep doing things they love. As well as the tips above, you can help by:

- walking regularly with your friend or family member, if you can
- choosing familiar routes to walk together

knowing their stamina and the length of time they usually walk for

be aware of more distant places, like an old home or a favourite park, that they might try to walk to