



FINDING Your Way[®]

*For people with dementia,
every step counts.*

LIVING SAFELY with **DEMENTIA**

A Resource Guide

Strategies for living an
active, safe and
engaged lifestyle

Alzheimer Society
ONTARIO

www.alzheimerontario.ca



The Alzheimer Society of Ontario’s Finding Your Way® program, with involvement from people living with dementia, care partners, and other key stakeholders, have developed this resource to provide tips and strategies on various safety-related topics to help people living with dementia live safely in their day-to-day lives.

	Safety Plan.....	3
	Home Safety.....	4
	Sleeping Habits.....	5
	Staying Social.....	6
	Staying Active.....	7
	Driving.....	8
	Travel.....	9
	Medication.....	10
	Nutrition and Food.....	11
	Living Alone.....	12
	Assessing the Living Environment.....	13

Visit alzheimerontario.ca or a local Alzheimer Society for more resources or to explore your options.



Visit FindingYourWayOntario.ca to learn about the risks of going missing and get resources to help people living with dementia stay safe in their community.

Safety Plan

Sixty percent of people living with dementia will go missing at some point, often without warning. It's important to have a safety plan in the event someone goes missing.

You may want to:

- Complete [Finding Your Way's Identification Kit](#) and keep it somewhere safe. Consider leaving a copy with a trusted friend or neighbour, and another at a cottage or second home.
- Consider a [tracking device](#).
- Become familiar with the [Incident Response Checklist](#). It lists the steps to follow if someone living with dementia goes missing.
- Become familiar with the [Post-Incident Checklist](#). It lists the steps to follow when reuniting after someone living with dementia goes missing.



Home Safety

As dementia develops, there may be changes in balance, visual perceptions, memory, and judgement. A person living with dementia may feel more tired and stressed, making it harder to prevent accidents and reduce risks. However, making simple changes in the home can ensure the person is living safely with increased comfort levels, and greater peace of mind.

To create a safer living environment:

- Complete the [Home Safety Checklist](#) to identify and address home safety risks.
- Be prepared for emergencies. Keep a working fire extinguisher in a clear location, a fully stocked first-aid kit on-hand, and a list of emergency numbers by the phone. Be sure to check the fire alarm monthly.
- Ensure there is proper lighting throughout the home to reduce the risk of injury: outside landings, between rooms, on stairways and in bathrooms. Consider using contrasting colours to make steps and transitions (e.g. the beginning of a staircase) easier to see. Remove any dark rugs as they may be disorienting.
- Make the bathroom safer. Install grab bars and add non-slip stickers to slippery surfaces such as tile floors and in the bathtub. Remove locks in bathrooms and bedrooms to avoid being locked in.
- Keep dangerous tools, such as drills, lawn mowers, power tools, knives and firearms in a safe place to prevent accidents. Ensure that power tools are unplugged when not in use.
- Consider using appliances that have the ability to turn off automatically. Also, consider re-locating appliances that may come into contact with water (i.e., near a sink).



Keep in mind that having too many safety restrictions can impede self-esteem and opportunities to engage in enjoyable activities around the home.

Sleeping Habits

People living with dementia may have difficulty staying asleep at night. They may wake more frequently and have more difficulty falling back to sleep. They may also sleep during the day and may be unable to sleep at night. When awake, they may leave the house when others are unaware, leading to a potential safety risk.

To help improve a night's rest, try:

- Staying away from alcohol, caffeinated drinks, and nicotine whenever possible, especially in the evening.
- Maintaining a usual sleeping pattern, prior to a dementia diagnosis. If one typically gets up early in the morning, try to continue that habit.
- Going outdoors in the morning and before sunset. Exposure to daylight is important for regulating the brain's clock.
- Napping. Napping can be refreshing, but it can also disrupt sleep schedules. If a nap is needed, try to do so before lunch time. Naps should either be 10-15 min in length (a restorative nap), or 90 min (a complete sleep cycle).
- Keeping the room temperature between 18-22°C.
- Keeping noise level to a minimum. If noise levels can't be reduced, try a white noise machine or run a fan during the night.



Everyone has different preferences when it comes to sleeping—take the time to [learn about sleeping habits](#) that work best.

Staying Social

Staying social is great for brain health as it reduces stress and boosts one's mood. Staying social can also increase one's safety. Being socially active allows for a strengthened support network and community profile, enabling others to offer assistance if there is a safety concern.

To increase social activity, people living with dementia can:

- Connect with a **local Alzheimer Society** to learn more about how to stay social and active in the community. A local Society may have programs that can help.
- Keep a sense of humour. Laughing is great for the body and soul, and a great way to engage with others. Try activities that will be entertaining and fun, like seeing live comedy or a play.
- Maintain friendships and networks: have an ongoing social date (e.g. third Thursday of every month) with friends to keep the connection strong.
- Set up a Facebook, Skype or other social media account to stay connected with friends and family. This will help to stay connected even if friends and family live far away, or if it becomes difficult to meet in person.
- Become a volunteer in the community! Volunteering can help maintain connections and engagement with others in the neighbourhood and improve physical and mental well-being. Keep an eye on newspaper listings and local postings for places to volunteer.



Staying Active

Regular exercise and activity can improve overall health by reducing the risk of heart disease, stroke, and diabetes, all of which have been linked to an increased risk of dementia. Staying active can help to maintain independence by improving muscle strength and reducing stress, allowing for greater ease with day-to-day functions. Improving muscle strength can reduce the risk of falls, allowing for a safer and more active lifestyle.

Those living with dementia might consider:

- Switching perspectives and frame exercise with benefits to one's safety. Begin a routine by taking simple steps, such as walking to the corner store instead of driving, or going on a bike ride instead of watching TV.
- Trying an exercise class, as it can help boost strength and provide social opportunities. See if the church, YMCA, or local community centre offers classes. Some low-impact classes include swimming, Nordic Pole walking, or Tai Chi.
- Talking to a doctor to explore the best forms of exercise taking into account any other health issues and current physical ability to prevent injury.
- Keeping the brain active! Daily crossword puzzles, word searches, or Sudoku puzzles are easy “exercises” to keep the brain fit. Try some of the [BrainBooster®](#) activities to get started.
- Calling a [local Alzheimer Society](#) to see how to get involved with Minds in Motion®. [Minds in Motion®](#) is a community-based social program that incorporates physical activity and mental stimulation for people with early to mid-stage dementia and care partners.



Driving

People living with dementia may still be able to drive for some time after a diagnosis of dementia. However, it is important to keep in mind that there may come a point when it is no longer safe to do so.

When it comes to driving, consider:

- Having a discussion early on in the diagnosis that access to the car may be removed at some point. Knowing sooner rather than later that it will happen might make it easier when the time comes.
- Keeping an eye out for: slow response times, traffic violations, collisions, taking too long to reach a destination, or not reaching the destination at all.
- Involving a professional. Ask a doctor to help determine when it's no longer safe to drive. It may make it easier for family members as well as for the person living with dementia. Be aware that in some provinces, the doctor may be bound by law to immediately report medical conditions that would impair a person's driving skills.
- Reassessing driving skills regularly. Arrange to have special testing to assess driving abilities. This could be a driving simulation test and/or a road test, carried out by someone with experience in testing cognitive impairment on the road. Consult with a physician for a referral.
- Contacting a **local Alzheimer Society**. Society staff are equipped to deal with difficult decisions and can help point families in the right direction to assist with having the "talk."



Driving must be stopped immediately if the safety of the person living with dementia or others on the road is at risk.

Travel

While traveling, whether near or far, is something that many enjoy, changes associated with dementia may make it difficult to travel.

To ensure safety while traveling, some precautions can be taken, such as:

- Asking to have a friend, partner, or family member come along in case help is needed.
- Planning ahead when using public transportation. Write down how to get there and back to ensure familiarity with the route. Think about talking to a bus driver or transit employee about any potential safety concerns, such as a route disruption.
- Traveling during the day. If traveling at night, consider letting someone know the departure time, destination, and the expected time of return.
- Exploring community based transportation programs in the area instead if there are safety concerns around driving—such as shuttles for seniors' shopping or specially priced seniors' taxis. A local community centre may be able to provide more information on what is available in the area.



Medication

People living with dementia may take multiple prescribed medications related and/or unrelated to their dementia diagnosis. Medications can be powerful. Special care needs to be taken to make sure they are administered properly and safely.

To ensure proper and safe medication use:

- Stay organized by using a pill dispenser. This will help track when to take which medication.
- Keep an updated list of medications with instructions on when and how to take them, so that family, friends, or a professional can assist when needed. Consider bringing this to any medical appointments.
- Keep an eye on medicine expiry dates. Pharmacists can be a good resource when reviewing medications.
- Check with the doctor regularly to review prescribed medications and ensure they are being taken correctly. Take notes on what was discussed and set a reminder for future appointments. If possible, attend the appointment with a care provider.



Nutrition and Food

A healthy diet can have many benefits for the brain and general body function. While there is no strict “diet” for people living with dementia, research has found a diet that is both nutritious and balanced may help boost brain functioning, slow memory decline, and increase energy levels.

Consider these options:

- Follow [Canada’s Food Guide](#) as a guideline for healthy eating, unless otherwise advised by a professional.
- Make a weekly food plan to ensure regular meal consumption and healthy eating is not left to chance. Use this plan to assist with grocery shopping.
- Keep hydrated—drink plenty of fluids (especially water). Try to limit alcohol, caffeine, and salt intake.
- Check expiry dates on food regularly—throw out anything that is expired or past its “best before” date.



Living Alone

Living alone can be difficult for people living with dementia, but it can also provide increased independence and confidence. For people living with dementia that want to live alone, it is important to remain safe while doing so.

There are some safety steps that can be followed:

- Arrange for outside help with housekeeping, meal preparation, and transportation. A local Alzheimer Society may be able to suggest some options.
- Have an occupational therapist assess the home to suggest ways in which areas or tasks could be made safer.
- Have a friend or family member visit or call once a day.
- Leave a set of keys with a trusted friend or neighbour.
- Consider appointing someone to assist with making important decisions; ensure details are documented on how financial, legal, and care wishes should be handled.
- Use labels, notes, and alarms as ongoing reminders of routine safety tasks. For example, place a sticky note near the “off” button on the stove to serve as a reminder to shut it off after being used.



Assessing the Living Environment

There may come a time when it is no longer safe for a person living with dementia to live at home. Deciding when to change the living environment, such as transitioning into a long-term care home, can be a difficult decision. However, it's important to ensure that this decision is made by a group consisting of care partners, a family doctor, and the person living with dementia, and keeps the safety of the person living with dementia top of mind.

Consider these tips that may assist with this decision:

- Talk about it early: decide and agree together at what point it would no longer be safe to live at home.
- Keep an eye out for any changes in environment or ability that may create a safety concern.
- If adequate care can no longer be provided or received, or if there is a safety risk involved, it may be time to consider other housing options.



Visit [Finding Your Way's® resources page](#) for videos, documents and web links to learn more about living safely with dementia.

Société Alzheimer Society ONTARIO

The Alzheimer Society of Ontario's Finding Your Way® program would like to thank all individuals involved in the creation of this resource, which has been generously funded by the Ministry of Seniors Affairs.

It would not have been possible without the generous contributions from people living with dementia, care partners, those working with people living with dementia, local Alzheimer Societies, and other key stakeholders.

