

Disaster Preparedness from the Alzheimer's Association

What should a family who is caring for someone with dementia do in case of an emergency or natural disaster?

If you know a pending disaster is about to occur:

- Get yourself and the person with Alzheimer's to a safe place.
- Alert others (family, friends, medical personnel) to the fact that you are changing locations, and give them your contact information. Contact them as regularly as you can as you move.
- Be sure there are people other than the primary caregiver who have copies of the person with dementia's medical history, medications, and physician information.
- Purchase extra medications.

Advance preparations

Safe Return®

As a precaution, register your loved one in the Alzheimer's Association Safe Return® program.

- Safe Return® is an identification and support program that provides assistance for a person with Alzheimer's who wanders off and becomes lost, either locally or far from home.
- If you are already registered in Safe Return®, make sure personal contact information, medicines needed, and doctor information are updated with the program.
- You can enroll in Safe Return® by phone, online or by mail. Call toll-free 1.888.572.8566 or visit www.alz.org/safereturn/

Emergency kit

Consider preparing an emergency kit in advance. Keep it in a watertight container and store it in an easily accessible location. Your emergency kit might include:

- Easy-on flotation devices, such as Floaties armbands.
- Easy on/off clothes (a couple of sets).
- Velcro shoes/sneakers.
- Back-up eyeglasses.
- Incontinence products.
- Wipes.
- Lotion (good for soothing the person).
- Pillow, toy or something else to hug.
- Favorite items or foods. Liquid meals.
- Supplies of medication.
- Extra identification items for the person, such as an ID bracelet and clothing tags.
- Copies of legal documents, such as power of attorney.
- Copies of medical documents that indicate the individual's condition and current medications.
- Copies of insurance and Social Security cards.
- Zip-lock bags to hold medications and documents.
- Physician's name, address and phone numbers (including cell phone).
- Alzheimer's Association phone number and address. Alzheimer's Association Safe Return® phone number.
- Recent picture of the person with dementia.

More information on disaster preparedness from the National Hurricane Center is at www.nhc.noaa.gov.

Tips for when you are relocated

In an emergency, people with dementia and their caregivers may find themselves uprooted or displaced to alternative living arrangements. Extra care and attention must be made to ensure the health and safety of the people with dementia. The change of location, plus unfamiliar noises and activities, may cause them increased stress and confusion. And, certain behaviors of persons with Alzheimer's may puzzle or alarm others.

Be calm and supportive

- Remain flexible, patient and calm – a person with dementia will respond to the tone you set.
- Respond to an emotion being expressed by the person. Ask, “Are you feeling frightened?” Offer your hand or a hug.
- Offer reassurance, such as “I will take care of you.” Or, “Don't worry. You will have everything you need here.”
- Don't leave the person with Alzheimer's alone. Don't ask a stranger to watch the person. A person who doesn't understand Alzheimer's disease and its effects, and who doesn't know you or the person, won't understand how to react in a difficult situation.

Create a safe environment

- Try to spend extra time with the person to help him or her adjust to the new environment.
- As much as is possible, maintain daily routines from before the disaster. For instance, accommodate familiar eating and bathing times.
- Maintain regular times for going to bed and arising. Establish a comfortable, secure sleeping environment.
- If possible, label important areas – such as the bathroom and sleeping area – to help the person become oriented to the new layout.
- Use simple statements to indicate the need to stay where you are. Divert attention to a new topic.

For example: “I know you want to go home. For now, we need to stay here. Let's see if we can get some lunch.”

- As appropriate, inform people around you that the person has memory loss or dementia.
- If you are in someone's home, arrange to make the house safer by locking up medications, toxic household supplies, sharp objects, alcohol and matches. Place nightlights throughout the house for nighttime safety and orientation.
- Limit news media exposure (TV, radio, computer) to the disaster.

Take care of your loved one

- Ensure proper nutrition and hydration.
- Make it a priority to find a doctor and pharmacy to provide for the person's health needs. Be sure you have up-to-date medical information and a current list of medications.
- Take time to reminisce, share family photos and stories.
- Involve the person in daily activities.
- Get daily exercise and get outside for fresh air and sunshine.

Take care of yourself, too

- Take care of yourself by finding a good listener to hear your thoughts and feelings about the event or just take a moment to breathe, meditate, reflect. Seek spiritual support.

To learn more about Alzheimer's disease and the Alzheimer's Association, visit www.alz.org

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Fact sheet updated **September 14, 2005**