

Wandering in Dementia: Safety Strategies

A Guide for Patients & Families

Wandering is a common behavior in people living with dementia. A person may walk or leave a safe area without realizing where they are going or how to return. Wandering can happen because of confusion, restlessness, searching for something familiar, or difficulty understanding their environment. While wandering can be dangerous, there are many practical strategies families can use to improve safety.

Common Signs That Someone May Wander

- Trying to leave the home repeatedly
- Pacing or restlessness
- Saying they need to “go home” even when already home
- Looking for a person, place, or object from the past
- Attempting to follow someone out the door
- Becoming disoriented in familiar places

Why Wandering Happens

- Memory loss or confusion
- Searching for something familiar
- Boredom or lack of activity
- Anxiety, agitation, or stress
- Physical discomfort such as hunger, pain, or needing the bathroom
- Changes in routine or environment

Safety Strategies at Home

Secure the Environment

- Install door alarms or motion sensors
- Use locks placed higher or lower on doors
- Consider childproof door covers or safety devices

- Place signs or visual cues on doors to discourage exiting

Provide Supervision

- Ensure someone is present to monitor safety
- Inform neighbors about the situation so they can help if needed
- Consider adult day programs or respite services for supervision

Use Identification

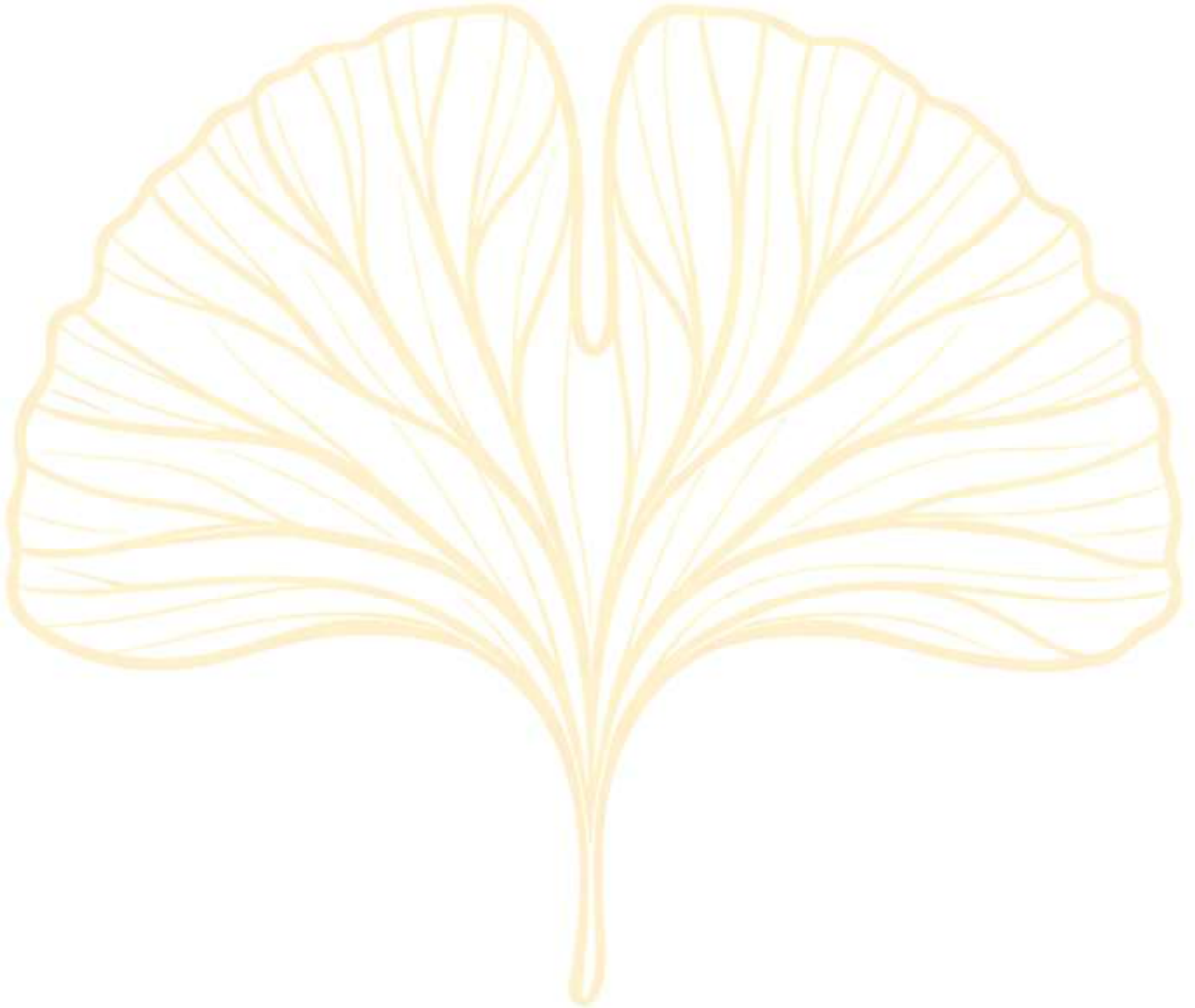
- Have the person wear a medical ID bracelet
- Keep identification in their clothing or wallet
- Consider GPS tracking devices designed for dementia safety

Reduce Restlessness

- Provide regular physical activity during the day
- Maintain consistent daily routines
- Offer meaningful activities to reduce boredom

If a Loved One Goes Missing

- Search the immediate area first
- Contact neighbors or nearby businesses
- Call local law enforcement if the person is not found quickly
- Provide a recent photo and description
- Inform responders that the person has dementia



Planning Ahead

- Register with local safety programs such as “Safe Return” or similar programs
- Keep updated photos and identifying information
- Inform neighbors and nearby community members about the risk of wandering
- Create a plan for what to do if the person leaves unexpectedly

Tips for Caregivers

- Try to understand the reason behind the wandering behavior
- Stay calm and avoid confrontation
- Redirect attention to a safe activity
- Seek professional advice if wandering becomes frequent or dangerous

National Organizations & Resources

✓ Alzheimer's Association – MedicAlert® + Safe Return®

☎ 800-272-3900 | 🌐 alz.org

✓ National Institute on Aging

🌐 nia.nih.gov

✓ Family Caregiver Alliance

🌐 caregiver.org

✓ Eldercare Locator

☎ 1-800-677-1116 | 🌐 eldercare.acl.gov

Final Notes

- Wandering is a common and potentially dangerous symptom of dementia.
- Safety planning and environmental changes can greatly reduce risk.
- Caregivers should seek support and guidance when wandering becomes difficult to manage.