

## WHAT TO DO WHEN WANDERING OCCURS

---

Wandering is an emergency. Immediate action is critical to a safe recovery: 94% of wanderers are found within 1.5 miles from where they disappeared, and 29% of wanderers are located in briar or brush areas.

- Call 911 immediately to report the person missing – early response is critical to locating the wanderer safely.
- Provide police with a current close-up photo of the wanderer.
- Provide police with a list of locations where the person may wander, such as past jobs, former homes, a church or favorite restaurant and a list of past locations or areas where the wanderer has been located.
- Notify neighbors to be on the lookout.
- If searching for the wanderer, at least one person must remain at the location from where the person wandered. If the person did not wander from home, have someone wait at the residence in case he/she returns home.
- Contact the Medic Alert + Safe Return hotline or other monitoring program for which the wanderer is enrolled for additional resources.

## IDENTIFICATION

---

Proper identification of a wanderer assists citizens and law enforcement with a safe and timely return. There are several ways to aid in identifying a person who may wander:

- Label clothing with identifying information and have the wanderer regularly wear a lanyard, pouch, or fanny pack containing identification and contact information for caregivers.

- Medic Alert + Safe Return: A 24-hour emergency response service for individuals with Alzheimer's disease or dementia that wander or have a medical emergency. Includes medical alert ID jewelry to be worn by the person to assist with identification when found, even if the wanderer has not yet been reported missing.

(\*Scholarships are available for families on limited incomes to assist with the cost of the program through the San Diego Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association)

888-572-8566

[www.medicalert.org/safereturn](http://www.medicalert.org/safereturn)

- Comfort Zone: A location-based mapping system that works like a GPS tracker to monitor the location of a member that can be tracked through a website or monitoring center; includes the Medic Alert + Safe Return program.

800-272-3900

[www.alz.org/comfortzone](http://www.alz.org/comfortzone)

- Care Trak Systems, Inc.: A mobile tracker and perimeter system that uses radio frequencies to track the radio signal of a transmitter bracelet worn by the wanderer.

800-842-4537

[www.caretrak.com](http://www.caretrak.com)

- Project Lifesaver International: A LoJack transmitter bracelet tracks the whereabouts of a wanderer using radio frequencies.

877-580-5433

[www.projectlifesaver.org](http://www.projectlifesaver.org)

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

---

*County of San Diego*

*Aging & Independence Services*

Includes: Adult Protective Services, Long Term Care Ombudsman, Adult Day Care Program, Caregiver Support Program, In Home Care, In Home Meal Program, Medicare & Legal Assistance

800-510-2020 [www.sandiego.networkofcare.org](http://www.sandiego.networkofcare.org)

*Joslyn Senior Center / Project CARE*

*(Community Action to Reach the Elderly)*

760-839-4688

ESCONDIDO  
POLICE DEPARTMENT

FAMILY PROTECTION  
UNIT

---

*Alzheimer's Disease,  
Dementia,  
and Wandering*



*A Resource Guide  
for Caregivers  
and Families*

ESCONDIDO POLICE DISPATCH CENTER  
760-839-4722

## *What is Alzheimer's?*

---

Alzheimer's disease is a disease of the brain that causes problems with memory, thinking and behavior. It worsens over time and can affect a person's ability to function at home, at work, in hobbies or in social settings. Other symptoms can include confusion, getting lost in familiar places, misplacing things, and trouble with language. There is no known cure but there is treatment available to manage many of the symptoms.

Dementia is a general term for loss of memory and other mental abilities severe enough to interfere with daily life. It is caused by physical changes in the brain. Alzheimer's is the most common form of dementia, accounting for 60-80% of all dementia cases.

## *10 Warning Signs of Alzheimer's*

---

1. Memory loss that affects daily life
2. Challenges in planning or solving problems
3. Difficulty completing tasks at work, at home or at leisure
4. Confusion with time or place
5. Trouble understanding visual images or spatial relationships
6. New problems with words in writing or speaking
7. Misplacing things and losing the ability to retrace steps
8. Decreased or poor judgment
9. Withdrawal from work or social activities
10. Changes in mood and personality

## *Wandering*

---

Six out of 10 people with Alzheimer's will wander. Many wanderers cannot remember their name or address. They may become disoriented and lost, even in their own neighborhood.

### *Who's at risk? A person who...*

- Returns from a regular walk or drive later than usual.
- Tries to fulfill former obligations, such as going to work (when no longer employed).
- Tries to "go home" even when at home.
- Is restless, paces or makes repetitive movements.
- Has difficulty locating familiar places, even rooms within the home.
- Checks the whereabouts of familiar people.
- Acts as if doing a hobby or chore, but nothing gets done (e.g., moves around pots and dirt without planting anything).
- Feels lost in a new or changed environment.
- Acts nervous or anxious in crowded areas, such as shopping malls or restaurants.
- Has wandered before.

### *Preparation and Prevention*

Wandering can occur anytime. Planning ahead can assist with prevention, as well as locating a wanderer quickly when it occurs.

- Enroll in Medic Alert + Safe Return and/or other monitoring programs.
- Identify most likely times of day when wandering occurs and plan activities during that time to occupy the person's attention.
- Provide activities and exercise to reduce restlessness and provide daily structure.
- Limit daytime naps or fluids 2 hours before bedtime for nighttime wanderers.
- Night lights throughout home
- Place locks out of sight, such as slide bolts at the top or bottom of the door.

- Camouflage doors or door knobs with removable curtains, painting them the same color as the wall or covering the handle with a towel that matches the door color.
- Install warning bells above the door or motion monitoring devices.
- Do not leave wanderers alone in a car or at home.
- Place hedges or fences around the patio, yard or other outside common areas.
- Reduce noise levels and excess stimulation that increases confusion for the person.
- Provide person with brightly colored clothing to wear.
- Label rooms inside the home to assist the person with identifying where to go.
- Keep a list of people for wanderer to call when feeling overwhelmed. Have numbers in one location.
- Ask neighbors, friends and family to call if they see the person alone or dressed inappropriately
- Keep a recent, close-up photo on hand to give to police, if needed.
- Know your neighborhood and points of danger (water, dense foliage, heavy traffic, etc.)
- Keep a list of places where the person may wander, such as past jobs, former homes, a church or favorite restaurant.

For more information on Alzheimer's disease and resources available, contact:

*Alzheimer's Association*  
[www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org)

*San Diego Alzheimer's Association*  
[www.sanalz.org](http://www.sanalz.org)

*24-Hour Helpline: 800-272-3900*