


# Wandering & Dementia

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# Agenda

- Understanding wandering
  - Warning signs
  - Case examples
  - Reasons for wandering & reducing risks
  - Becoming prepared
  - Locating devices
  - If an incident occurs
  - Resources
- 


# Understanding Wandering

- Wandering refers to a variety of behaviours that may result in a person living with dementia becoming lost.
- Wandering is a direct result of physical changes in the brain and:
  - Is a common behaviour associated with dementia.
  - May occur at any time of the day or night.
  - May lead the person with dementia outdoors, which can expose them to dangers such as traffic or dangerous weather conditions.
  - May occur on foot, by car or via public transportation.

# Warning Signs for Wandering

- A person living with dementia returning from a regular walk or drive later than usual.
- References a need to fulfill former obligations, such as going to work or picking up the children from school.
- A desire to “go home,” even when at home.

# Warning Signs for Wandering Cont'd...

- Has difficulty navigating familiar places, such as locating the bathroom or bedroom.
  - Not dressing appropriately for the weather.
  - Pacing, looking confused or disoriented.
  - Repeating the same question within a short period of time.
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# Case Example 1 – Barbara and Joe

Barbara (76) is a care partner to her husband Joe (78), who lives with dementia. The couple live in a bungalow on a quiet street in Winnipeg. Joe enjoys a morning walk each day to the local coffee shop, about 3 blocks from home. Barbara becomes worried as Joe has returned later than usual today.

## Case Example 2 – Debby and Oscar

Debby (53) takes her father Oscar (81) to the local shopping mall once a week to give her mother (Oscar's wife) some respite. Debby and Oscar both use the washroom and have arranged to meet one another outside when they are finished. Oscar finishes first and instead of waiting outside the washroom, he heads through the doors of the mall and into the parking lot. Debby is panicked when she can't find her dad.

## Case Example 3 – Maria

Maria (63) has been living in an assisted living complex for the past 2 years after receiving a diagnosis of Young-Onset Alzheimer's Disease. Due to the changes related to her dementia, Maria had to retire early from her job as a baker at the local grocery store. Other residents report that Maria is in the hallways late at night and yesterday security footage caught her walking out of the building around 4 am heading towards the bus stop.

# Reasons for Wandering

- Too hot or cold
- Agitated
- Discomfort (i.e., hungry, in pain, or in need of the toilet)
- False beliefs
- Not recognize current home and in search of somewhere more familiar
- Continuation of a long-standing habit
- Disorientation
- Delusions/hallucinations
- Lack of safe activities for energy outlet
- Boredom
- Restlessness

# Reducing the Risk of Wandering

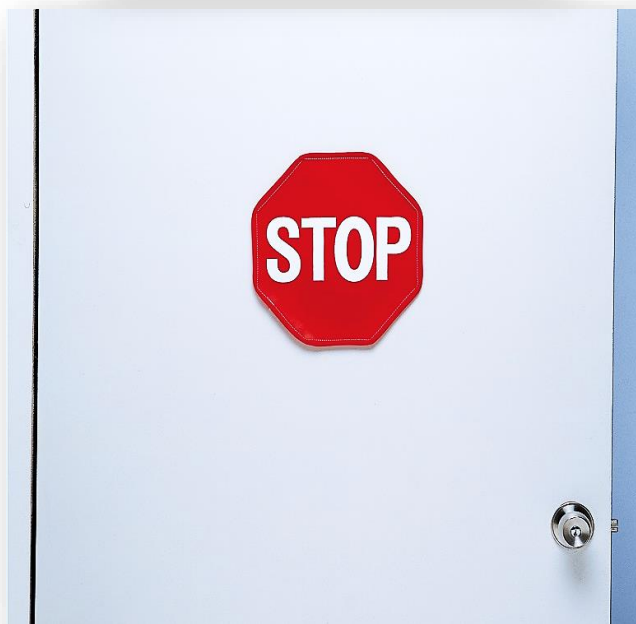
No one thing is going to prevent a person living with dementia from wandering. **Multiple strategies are recommended** to reduce the risk.



5 key areas to consider:

1. Examine the immediate environment
2. Exercise
3. Develop meaningful activities
4. Keep records
5. Develop community connections

# What Risk Reduction Might Look Like...



# Becoming Prepared

- Fill out an identification kit

## Identification kit

<p><b>About the person living with dementia</b></p> <p>First name: _____</p> <p>Last name: _____</p> <p>Nickname: _____</p> <p>Date of birth: _____</p> <p>Gender: _____</p> <p>Language(s) spoken: _____</p> <p>Cell phone: _____</p> <p>Home address: _____</p>	<p><b>Recent photo</b></p> <p>Place a recent, good quality photograph clearly showing the person's head and shoulders here. Replace the photo with an updated version as needed.</p>	<p><b>Physical description</b></p> <p>Height: _____ feet _____ inches      _____ metres _____ centimetres</p> <p>Weight: _____ lbs or _____ kgs</p> <p>Eye colour: _____</p> <p>Hair colour: _____</p> <p>Hair style: _____</p> <p>Ethnicity: _____</p> <p>Complexion: _____</p>	<p><b>Medical information</b></p> <p>Medical condition(s): _____</p> <p>Allergies: _____</p> <p>Current medication(s): _____</p> <p>Doctor's name: _____</p> <p>Doctor's phone number: (____) _____</p>
<p><b>Wandering history</b></p> <p>Has the person wandered before? <input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No</p> <p>What are the person's favourite places to visit?      _____</p> <p>Where did the person used to work?      _____</p> <p>What transit routes has the person taken in the past?      _____</p>	<p><b>Emergency contact person</b></p> <p>Name: _____</p> <p>Relation to person living with dementia:      _____</p> <p>Home phone: _____</p> <p>Cell phone: _____</p> <p>Work phone: _____</p> <p>Home address: _____</p>	<p><b>Identifying features</b></p> <p>Check all that apply:</p> <p>Hearing aid(s): <input type="checkbox"/> Left <input type="checkbox"/> Right</p> <p>Visual aid(s): <input type="checkbox"/> Glasses <input type="checkbox"/> Contacts</p> <p>Dentures: <input type="checkbox"/> Upper <input type="checkbox"/> Lower</p> <p>Walking aid: <input type="checkbox"/> Cane <input type="checkbox"/> Walker</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Wheelchair</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other (scars, birthmarks, tattoos). Location and description:      _____</p>	<p><b>Personal identification &amp; locating devices</b></p> <p>Is the person wearing a form of identification? Describe what it looks like. Is it a bracelet or necklace? What colour is it?      _____</p> <p>Does the person have a locating device? Note the type and model and describe what it looks like.      _____</p> <p><b>For people with access to a vehicle</b></p> <p>License plate number: _____</p> <p>Vehicle colour: _____</p> <p>Vehicle brand and model: _____</p>

# Becoming Prepared Cont'd...

- MedicAlert Safe & Found
- Customized identification



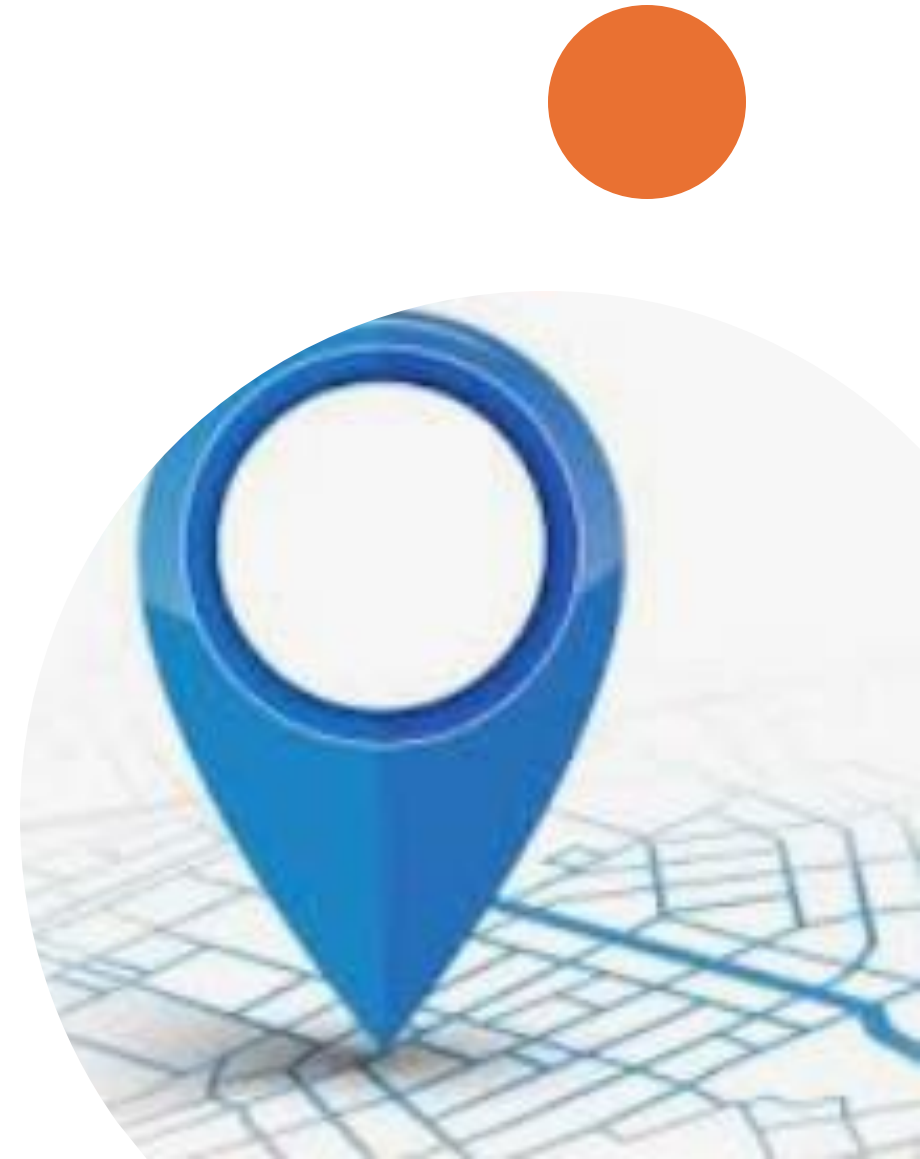
# Locating Devices

- Locating devices are electronic tools that can be used to follow a person's movements or identify a person's location.
- **No device or system can guarantee that a person living with dementia will not become lost or that they will be found if they do;** however, they may represent one part of an overall strategy to keep the person you support safer.
- **Multiple strategies are recommended to help reduce the risks for wandering.**



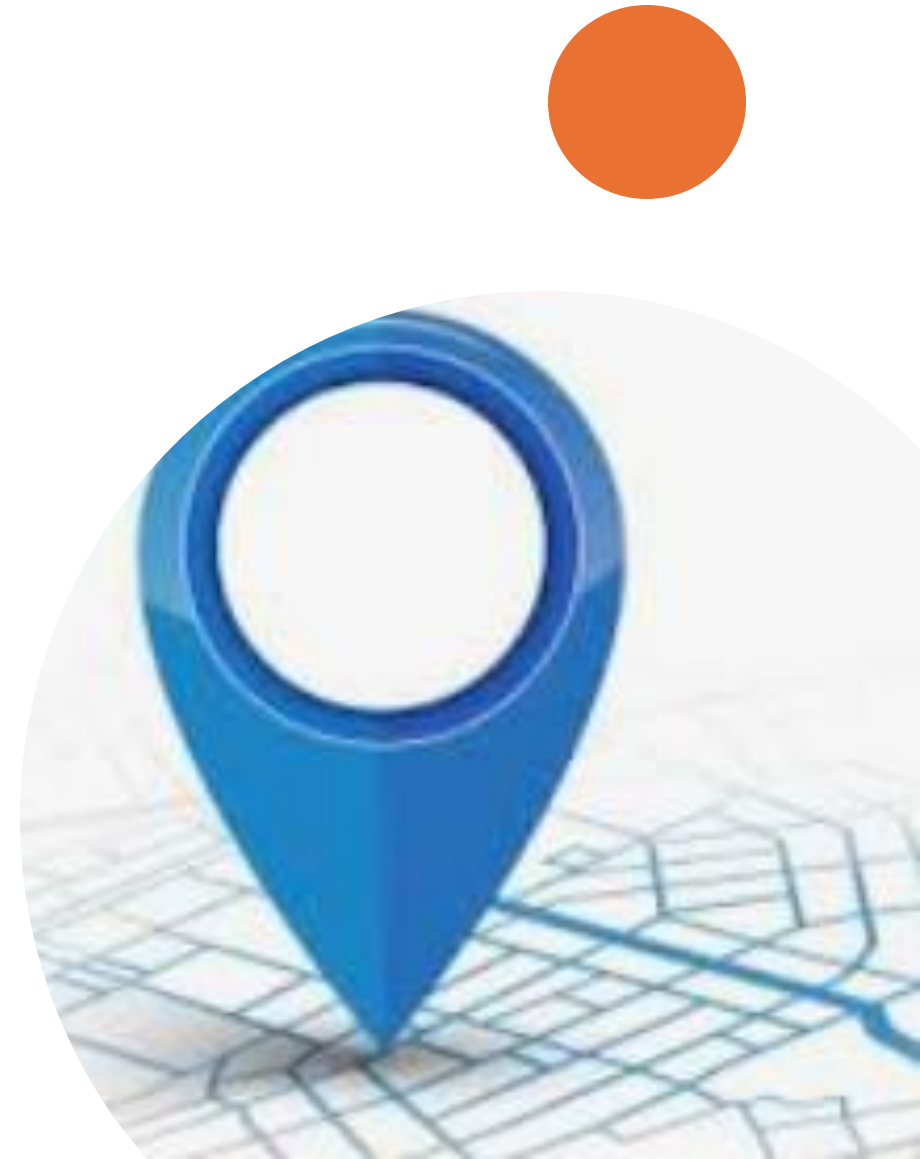
# Locating Devices Cont'd...

Device type	Applications	General features	Limitations
<b>GPS</b> (Global Positioning System)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Built into some models of cars.</li><li>• Some use internet maps to allow tracking.</li><li>• Some allow user-defined safe boundaries (signal sent if person goes outside of the set boundaries).</li><li>• Assisted GPS (A-GPS) uses an assistance server (cellular tower) to reduce locating time.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Uses radio signals transmitted from satellites to electronic receivers to identify the location of a person wearing a transmitter within a few metres.</li><li>• Relies on battery power. But could use AC power, computers, internet connections, standard telephone service, cellular phone service and call centre operators.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Intended for use outdoors.</li><li>• Not able to pinpoint exact location, if satellite signal is affected (for example, under bridges, inside buildings, underground or underwater).</li><li>• Satellite signals may be affected by electrical interference, dense bush, or high rises.</li><li>• Needs to be charged frequently.</li></ul>
<b>Radio frequency</b> (Radio frequency modulation or homing device)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Wristband worn by person.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Determines location using radio signals.</li><li>• Battery powered, lasts about 45 days.</li><li>• Works indoors and in wooded areas.</li><li>• Wearer has a unique radio frequency signal.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Limited range (usually less than five kilometres).</li><li>• Most effective indoors.</li></ul>



# Locating Devices Cont'd...

Device type	Applications	General features	Limitations
<b>Cell phone</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newer technologies such as smartphones and tablets.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>By dialing 9-1-1, the lost person often activates a locating system.</li> <li>Cell phone allows for two-way communication with the lost person and caller.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relies on person carrying cell phone and knowing how to use it.</li> <li>Depends on cellular signal.</li> <li>GPS and locating applications are only available on newer models of cell phones.</li> </ul>
<b>BLE</b> (Bluetooth Low Energy) *Apple AirTag	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An AirTag sends out a secure Bluetooth signal that can be detected by nearby devices in the Find My Network. These devices send the location of an AirTag to iCloud, then you can go to the Find My app and see it on the map.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bluetooth low energy, or BLE proximity locators, use a low energy Bluetooth signal received by an internet connected device to locate a transmitter.</li> <li>Battery powered, last approximately one year. Your iPhone or Apple device will let you know when it's time to replace the battery.</li> <li>AirTags are water resistant.</li> <li>IOS 17 lets you share AirTag with up to five people.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relies on person carrying the AirTag (i.e. attached to a keychain, placed in a wallet, sewn into a jacket pocket, etc.)</li> <li>Has to be connected to an Apple device (iPhone or iPad).</li> <li>Limited range makes it challenging to use in rural settings.</li> </ul>



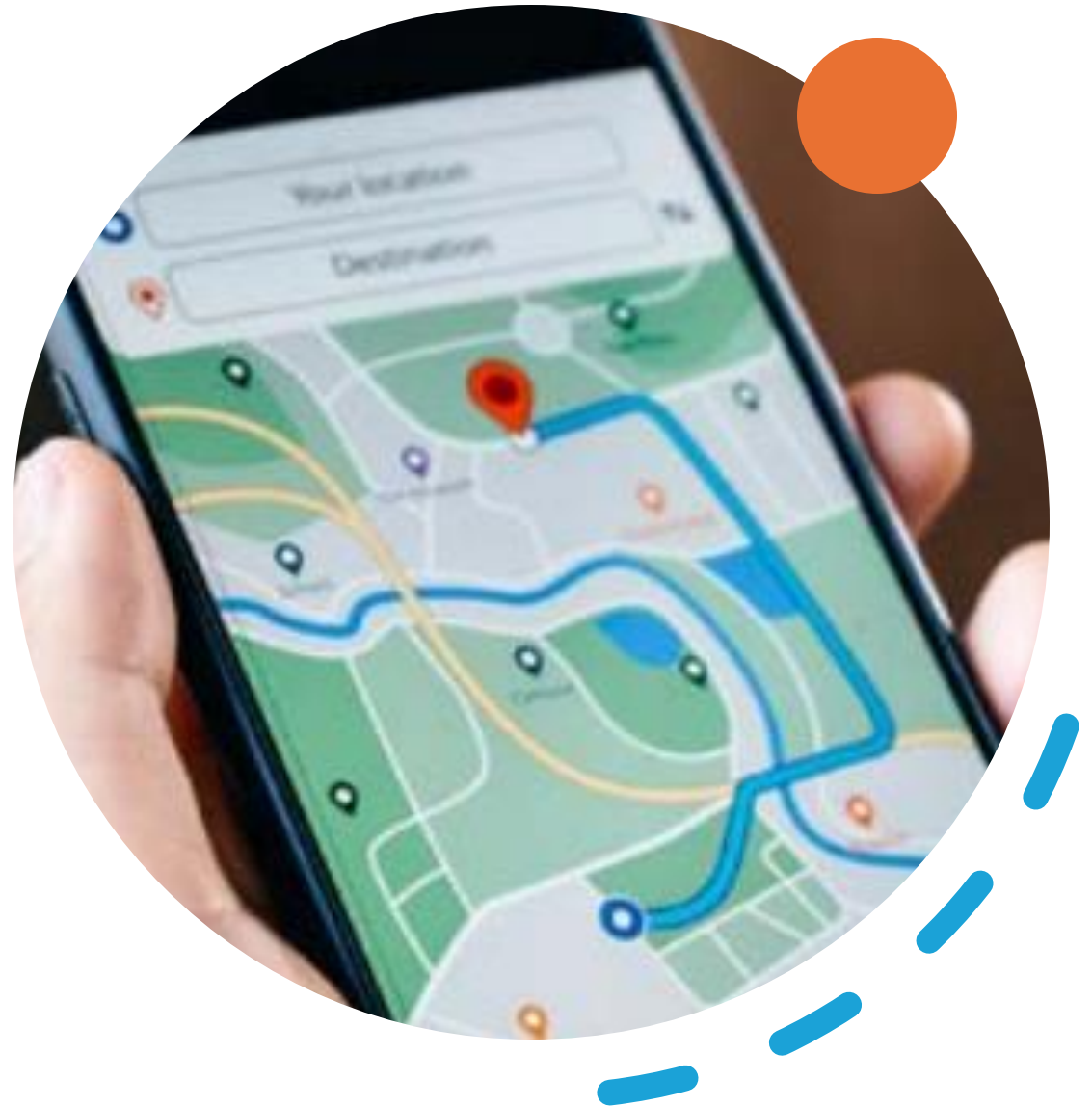
# Locating Devices: Ethical Considerations

- If you are deciding whether to use a locating device, consider the benefits, drawbacks and safety needs.
- Question to consider:
  - What effect, if any, will there be on personal dignity?
  - During their life, what value has the person living with dementia placed on their freedom and independence versus their safety/security?
  - How do these values influence the decision to use a locating device?

# Deciding on a Device

- Important considerations:
  - Affordability
  - Ease of handling/use
  - Service
  - Reliability

Is the device comfortable for the person to wear? Does it need to be attached or carried by the person?



# Deciding on a Device Cont'd...

## Checklist for comparing tracking devices

When researching tracking devices, use this checklist to compare features and to decide which device is most appropriate for the specific needs of the person living with dementia and their caregiver(s). Review various manufacturers' websites or call the manufacturer and ask questions. Record the following information about each device:

**Note:** Make sure the device is available in Canada. Devices from other countries may not work in Canada.

	Device Name: Model/Product #:	Device Name: Model/Product #:	Device Name: Model/Product #:
<b>Costs</b>			
Device			
Activation fee			
Subscription fee			
Is additional technology needed to use the device (smartphone, computer or tablet)?			
<b>Size and weight</b>			
Size			
Weight			
<b>Battery</b>			
Is the battery rechargeable?			
How often does it need recharging?			
How does it get recharged?			
<b>Range, accuracy and speed</b>			
Device range (What distance does it cover?)			
Device accuracy (How accurately does it find a person's location?)			
Speed of transmission (How fast can the device send information?)			

## Deciding on a device

It can be challenging to find a locating device that meets your exact needs. Fill out this check sheet for each device you are considering and compare. Salespersons or others using the device may be able to help you answer the questions.

### Device

Device type:

Device name:

Manufacturer:

### Affordability

Price of device:

Other costs (monthly fees, service calls, replacement batteries):

Is this device covered by an alternative funding source (insurance, service club)?  Yes  No

### Ease of handling/use

What level of technology are you comfortable with?

How often does the battery need recharging and/or replacing?

Does the technology require other equipment such as a computer, internet or cell phone? If yes, what?  Yes  No

Can the device be easily removed, lost or forgotten by the person?  Yes  No

### Service

Is a trial period offered?  Yes  No

How long is the warranty period?

What does the warranty cover?

Is there a policy for upgrading if needs change or a new technology becomes available? Is there a "loaner" unit that can be quickly accessed?  Yes  No

Depending on the technology that the tracking device uses, some are more effective outdoors than others. Will the locating device be used indoors, outdoors or both? Will the device be used in a rural or urban setting?  Yes  No



# If an Incident Occurs...

When a person living with dementia goes missing, it is an **emergency**- the most important thing is to not delay your response.

- Step 1: Check common areas
- Step 2: Contact the police or RCMP
- Step 3: Mobilize support

# Resources

## Tracking Devices

Alzheimer Society

Day-to-Day Series



Société Alzheimer Society  
ONTARIO

Contact

English

Language



LIVING SAFELY WITH DEMENTIA | BUILDING SAFE COMMUNITIES | ONLINE LEARNING | RESOURCES | FOR FIRST RESPONDERS | LOCATING TECHNOLOGY

## For people with dementia, every step counts.

Finding Your Way® helps people living with dementia, their families, caregivers and communities to recognize the risk of going missing, be prepared for incidents of going missing, and ensure that people with dementia can live safely in the community.

60 percent of people with dementia-related memory problems become lost at some point. **Watch the video below** to explore the ways Finding Your Way® can help.



Like all of us, people living with dementia have the right to move about as freely and independently as possible. At the same time, changes in the brain can affect a person's ability to find their way. Six in ten people who are living with dementia are at risk of getting lost in familiar or unfamiliar places.

A tracking device (sometimes also called a "locating device") can be a tool to help a person with dementia live as safely as possible.

### What are tracking devices?

Tracking devices use technology to help find a person or object. Other features can include providing information about travel speed and time.

### Questions to consider when choosing a tracking device

#### How do you (or the person you support) feel about using a tracking device?

Some people may think using a tracking device increases personal freedom, security and safety. Others may feel it is an invasion of privacy. If you are choosing a tracking device for someone else, consider the person's lifelong values and wishes about personal freedom, privacy, independence and safety. If you are supporting a person who may not need a device right away, talk to them about using a tracking device in the future.

#### Will you (or the person you support) remember to use the tracking device?

Each person living with dementia is unique, and their abilities may change over time. Similarly, each tracking device is unique – there is not one standard device that will work for every person. For any device to work well, a person must wear or carry the device with them.

#### Are you also considering other strategies to enhance safety?

No technology is fail-proof. For example, a tracking device may provide inaccurate readings. Or it might not work in rural or indoor areas. Also, tracking devices use a range of different technologies (see page 3 of this sheet for examples). Check that the technology of a device meets your unique needs (or those of the person you support).

Use multiple strategies to stay safe. Other strategies could include an ID card that lets others know that you (or the person you support) are living with dementia. Another could be a door alarm that notifies a caregiver when a person leaves the home.



Google Search

I'm Feeling Lucky

Google offered in: Français

# Resources Cont'd



## Information on locating devices

Six in ten people with dementia become lost at some point, often without warning. The balance between independence and safety is a delicate one. While being lost is distressing and has the potential to be dangerous, having a safety plan can shorten the time spent in searching for a lost person with dementia and reduce the harm.

This safety plan may include the use of locating devices and enrolling with a registry such as [MedicAlert](#), [SafelyHome](#) or a vulnerable persons' registry supported by your local police services or the OPP.

There are benefits and draw backs to locating devices. Some people may consider the use of a device improves personal freedom and safety while giving caregivers peace of mind. Others may feel this is an invasion of privacy.

Using a locating device does not decrease the need to check in often with the person with dementia.

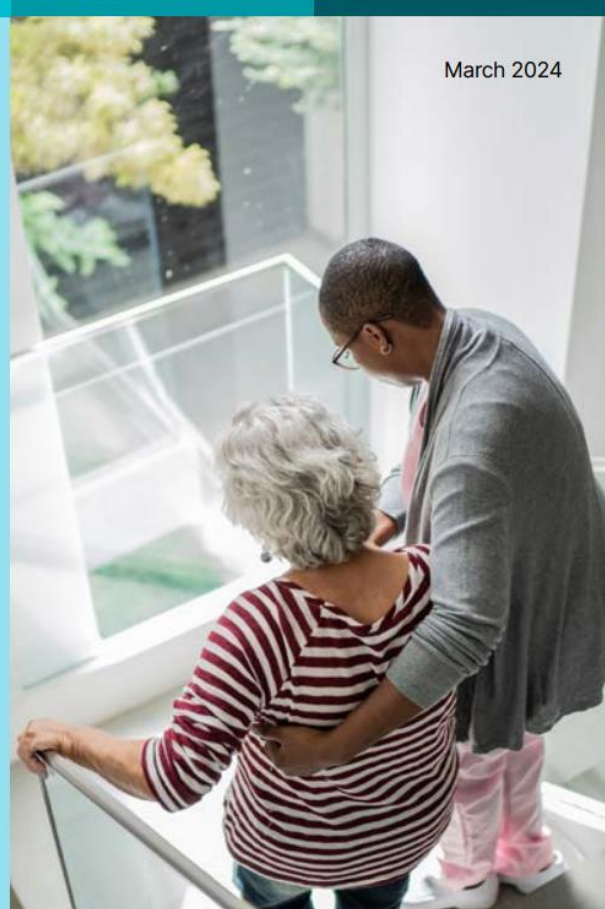
It is important that people who are recently diagnosed with dementia have a discussion as early as possible with the people who are important in their lives. An open discussion with all concerned will help with the decision making. Support is available from your local Alzheimer Society.

### Locating devices tend to fulfill two needs:

1. To locate a person who is lost.
2. To provide increased independence to a person who wishes to go out alone but may become lost.

## TOOLKIT TO MANAGE THE RISK OF GETTING LOST AND GOING MISSING FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH DEMENTIA

March 2024



Public Safety  
Canada



For local Alzheimer Society contact information, call 2-1-1  
Visit: [FindingYourWayOntario.ca](#)

Funded by  
*Société Alzheimer Society*



# Thank you!

Website: <https://alzheimer.mb.ca/>

Email: [alzmb@alzheimer.mb.ca](mailto:alzmb@alzheimer.mb.ca)

Phone: (204) 943-6622 or 1(800) 378-6699

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# Common Questions

**What should you do if you see someone in public who looks like they might be lost or confused?**

# Common Questions

**Are there any special considerations for reducing the risk of wandering when travelling with someone living with dementia?**

