

Alzheimer's Disease: Know The Risks Of Wandering

(NAPSA)—Wandering is one of the most frightening and potentially life-threatening behaviors that may accompany Alzheimer's disease. As many as 60 percent of people with Alzheimer's wander at some point, often leaving home and unable to find their way back. If a person is not found within the first 24 hours, there is a nearly 50 percent chance they will be at risk for serious injury or even death.

"For many families, wandering is often the first warning sign," said Kathy O'Brien of the Alzheimer's Association. "No two people experience the disease in the same way, so it's impossible to predict which individuals will wander and get lost. But, if someone wanders once, they likely will wander again."

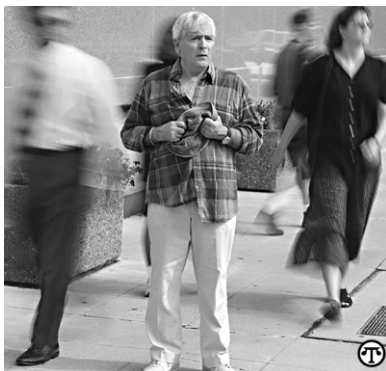
Wandering causes

Individuals who wander are confused and sometimes unable to ask for help, leaving them vulnerable to weather, traffic, and those who prey on the less fortunate. Wandering can be triggered by a number of factors:

- Medication
- Stress, restlessness, anxiety, agitation
- Inability to recognize familiar people, places or objects
- A desire to fulfill former obligations such as going to work or caring for a child
- The need for food, companionship or communication
- Fear arising from a misinterpretation of sights and sounds

Help for wanderers

The Safe Return Program, created in 1993, is the only nationwide identification program of its kind specifically for people with Alzheimer's. The program now



The Safe Return Program has a near 100 percent success rate in locating registrants who have wandered.

has more than 100,000 registrants and in its first decade has helped return nearly 8,000 people who have wandered.

"When someone is reported missing, a member of the Safe Return staff immediately relays identification information and a photograph to local authorities from a confidential national database," O'Brien said. "When someone finds a Safe Return registrant who has wandered and calls the toll-free number, Safe Return notifies the family or caregiver so they can be reunited with the wanderer."

The Alzheimer's Association encourages people to register in Safe Return as a safety net that may prevent a potentially deadly situation.

To learn more about the program, ways to prevent wandering, the warning signs of Alzheimer's disease, and steps for getting a diagnosis, contact the Alzheimer's Association at (800) 272-3900 or click on www.alz.org/SafeReturn.