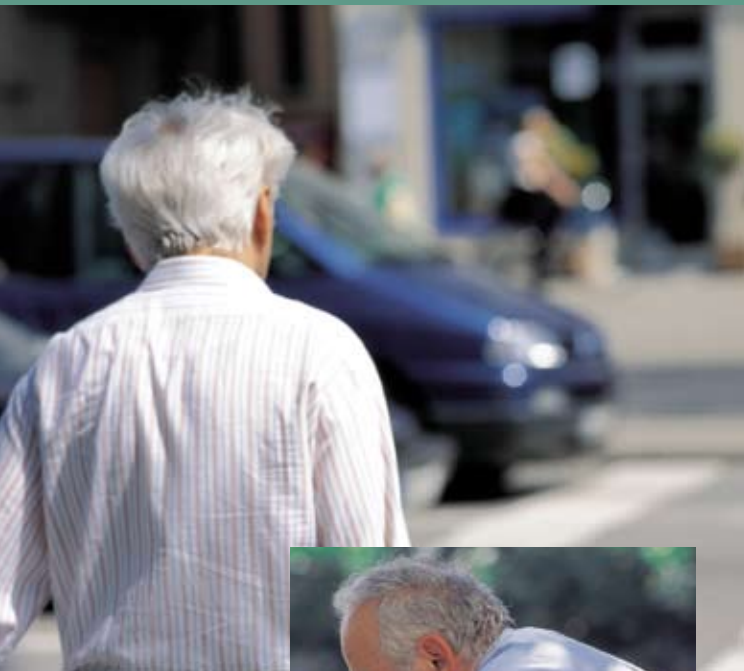


Staying Safe:
**WANDERING & THE
ALZHEIMER'S PATIENT**



Preventing Wandering 2

If a Person is Missing 4

Resources 6

One of the most dangerous behaviors associated with Alzheimer’s disease is wandering. An Alzheimer’s patient who wanders outside alone can easily become lost, confused, injured, and in the winter, even die from exposure. It is imperative, especially in the middle stage of the disease, that caregivers take steps to prevent wandering and know what to do if their loved one is missing.

Part of the job of preventing wandering is to try to identify the reasons why a patient may want to wander. Some common reasons for wandering are:

- **Confusion.** The patient doesn’t realize that he is at home, and sets out to “find” his home.
- **Delusions.** The patient may be trying to fulfill a responsibility from the long-ago past, such as going to work or searching for a child.
- **An attempt to escape** from a real or perceived threat. Patients can be frightened by a noisy home, a strange visitor or even the belief that her caregiver is trying to hurt her.

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- **Agitation**, which is a common symptom of Alzheimer’s disease can also be exacerbated by some medications.
 - **Restlessness**, brought on by a lack of exercise and other stimulation.
 - **Searching** for something, whether it is a person, a place or a personal item that he has lost.

Preventing Wandering

An Alzheimer’s patient who is restless or who has a tendency to wander should never be left alone. But even with another adult in the house, caregivers should take certain steps to lessen the danger that the patient will be able to get out of the house alone. Some of these steps include:

- Give the patient a safe, uncluttered **space to pace in**. Eliminate rugs and obstacles that the patient could trip on, and allow him to pace.
- Give the patient **something** repetitive **to do**, such as rocking in a rocking chair or glider, sweeping the floor or folding clothes.
- Add **deadbolts** to all doors leading to the outside, and keep the keys in a safe place, where the patient can’t get to them.
- Install **safety devices** from your local hardware store on all windows that limit how far they can be opened.
- Install **bells or alarms** that sound whenever an outside door is opened. These are also available at hardware stores.
- Obtain a **medical identification bracelet** for the patient with his or her name, the words “memory loss” and an emergency phone number on it. Make sure that the patient wears it at all times. These bracelets are often sold in drug stores.
- If possible, have a **fence** installed around your house that has a locked gate.
- **Notify your neighbors** that your loved one has a tendency to wander and ask them to alert you immediately if they see her out alone.
- Search special catalogs of **caregiving products** for motion detectors, electronic beepers, special latches and other products created for Alzheimer’s patients (See the Resources section at the back of this brochure to order some catalogs).

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- **Cover doors** with “camouflage” posters that make them look like book shelves or something other than a door. These can be ordered from catalogs. Doors can also be painted the same color as walls, to make them “disappear.”

If a Person is Missing

Even if you’ve taken all the above precautions, there is still a possibility that at some time, your loved one will manage to slip away unnoticed. If this happens, there are several things you should be prepared to do in order to find him as quickly as possible. These include:

- **Notify the police.** If your community is on the 911 system, call it. A missing Alzheimer’s patient should always be treated as an emergency.
- Have several copies of a recent, close-up **photograph** of the person to give to police, neighbors, and anyone else who might be searching for him.
- **Keep a list** (with several copies) with your loved one’s age, sex, height, weight and other physical features along with his or her blood type, health conditions, medications, dental work, dietary needs and other pertinent information to share with search personnel.

- Provide an unwashed **article of clothing** that has been worn by the patient and kept in a plastic bag to assist police dogs in the search for your loved one. Using plastic gloves to avoid adding your own scent, replace the clothing item every month to keep the scent strong.

- Have a **list** ready of **dangerous places** in your neighborhood that should be searched first, such as busy crossroads, nearby bridges, creeks or overpasses, a drainage ditch or steep terrain.
- Provide a **list of places where the person likes to go**, such as a shopping center, a place of worship, a park or another familiar place.

Remember that the more people you inform about your loved one’s condition and tendency to wander, the more help you can enlist in preventing him from getting lost.

Resources

Alzheimer's Disease Education and Referral Center

1-800-438-4380

www.alzheimers.org

Alzheimer's Disease Research

Provides information and publications to Alzheimer's caregivers. The website also has a wealth of resources, including how to obtain special catalogs of products designed for the Alzheimer's patient.

1-800-437-2423

www.ahaf.org

The Alzheimer's Store Catalog

Provides products for people with Alzheimer's disease and for those caring for them.

1-800-752-3238

www.alzstore.com

Eldercare Locator

National service that will help you locate a range of services in your area, including respite for caregivers.

1-800-677-1116

www.eldercare.gov

MedicAlert Foundation International

Offers a wide array of emblems and chains engraved with the patient's membership number, principal medical condition, and its toll-free number. You can contact a 24-hour emergency response center. In addition, MedicAlert calls the patient's family contacts and notifies them of your situation, so you won't be alone in an emergency.

1-888-633-4298

www.medicalert.org

National Adult Day Services Association

Provides help in locating adult day care services in your area for when you need someone to watch over your loved one.

1-800-558-5301

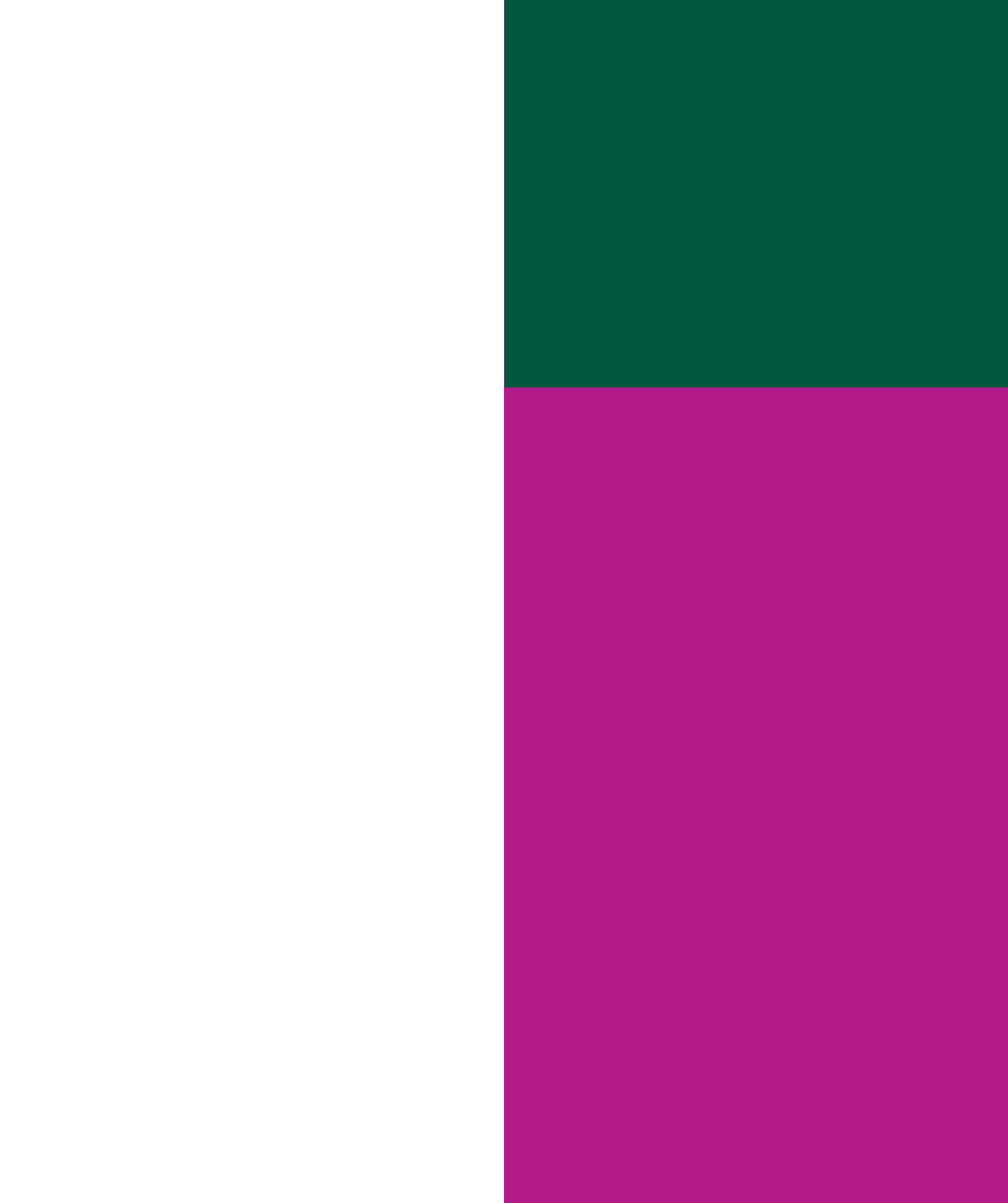
www.nadsa.org

Sears Home Health and Wellness Catalog

Provides home health care products for senior citizens.

1-800-326-1750

www.searshealthandwellness.com





ALZHEIMER'S
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