



At Arbor Springs, we are dedicated to helping families manage the realities of dementia with as much love, dignity and knowledge as possible. This monthly newsletter is our way of offering helpful tips and insights that will hopefully make your days with your loved one suffering from dementia a little easier, happier and calm.

Wandering, getting lost, and exit-seeking are common behaviors among people with dementia, and more than half of people with dementia will wander at some point during the course of their disease. Wandering can be helpful or dangerous, depending on the situation. Although people who wander may gain social contact, exercise, and stimulation, they can also wander into unsafe areas or become lost and physically exhausted. As a result, these behaviors can be among the most challenging for family and paid caregivers.

To prevent unsafe wandering it is important to discover the events or conditions that may trigger it. Often times caregivers will need to watch and observe what is happening when the person is wandering to discover the purpose behind their behavior. This may take time and require multiple observations. There are many reasons why a person who has dementia might wander including:

**Stress or fear-** as a reaction to an overstimulating environment, loud noise or situation he or she doesn't understand.

**Searching-** searching for something or someone.

**Boredom-** looking for something to do.

**Basic needs-** in response to unmet basic needs like human contact, hunger, or thirst: or because they are experiencing some type of discomfort, like pain or the need to use the toilet; or they may simply have the need to burn energy if they were always an active person.

**Following past habits or routines-** He or she may try to go shopping or go to work, because in their mind, that's what they always did.

Assessing the patterns, frequency, and triggers for wandering helps the caregiver in developing a person-centered plan to address these triggers. Here's some examples of what you can do:

If your loved one is experiencing stress or fear, eliminate over-stimulation such as visible doors that people use frequently; noise and clutter. Keep coats, umbrellas, bags, purses, door and car keys out of sight. Avoid busy places that are confusing and can cause disorientation like grocery

stores, shopping malls, and other busy venues. Attempt to alleviate fear with calming statements such as, "We are safe. I'm here with you and I'm going to stay with you."

If your loved one is searching for a spouse or child, talk calmly and provide reassuring statements like, "Your son knows you are here with me." Keep reminding them where they are and why they're here. You also might try posting a sign stating that the spouse or child will be visiting soon.

If your loved one is bored or is following past habits or routines it will be important to have a routine for daily activities. Having a routine provides structure. If your loved one is trying to go to work or shopping around the same time everyday, coincide meaningful activities to make them feel purposeful and keep them engaged. (At Arbor Springs we had a resident that was a retired nurse and we gave her a pseudo patient chart and would ask her to review the documentation in the medical record.)

As with anything, even our best thought out approaches are not always successful and it is often a process of learning and adapting. However, by maintaining your flexibility and creativity you are sure to find responses to your loved one's wandering that will promote your loved one's freedom of movement and safety and reduce their unmet needs.

If you have specific questions that you'd like answered in an upcoming issue of this newsletter please reach out to Monica Kuehl, RN, BSN ([m.kuehl@arborsprings.org](mailto:m.kuehl@arborsprings.org) or 515-223-1135) and we'll do our best to get to them all.