

Safety for Wandering

(adapted from the Alzheimer's Association Colorado Chapter Newsletter – Winter 2009)

Wandering is one of the most frequent and frightening challenges for those caring for someone with dementia. Approximately 67% of individuals living with dementia will wander and become lost during the course of the disease – many repeatedly.

Wandering may be triggered when a person with Alzheimer's Disease :

- Tries to search for familiar objects, surroundings or people when they no longer recognize their environment.
- Tries to fulfill former obligations, such as going to work or taking care of a child.
- Reacts to the side effects of medication that cause restlessness and confusion.
- Tries to relieve stress caused by noise, crowds or isolation.
- Is not getting enough physical activity.
- Is fearful of unfamiliar sights, sounds or hallucinations.
- Searches for something specific such as food, drink, the bathroom or companionship.

One must never assume that because you are at home with someone who has Alzheimer's or another memory-related or debilitating diagnosis, that wandering becomes less of an issue. It takes just a moment for someone to slip out of the house and the confusion and disorientation that accompany such diseases means your loved one could get hopelessly lost in a matter of minutes. Having a tracking device can provide you the peace of mind of knowing that your loved one could be located within a short period of time.

Medic Alert + Safe Return is one program that protects wanderers, activating the program hotline which draws on the resources of law enforcement, medical professionals and the local chapter staff to assist when a member of this program wanders or a medical emergency occurs.

It is not uncommon for a wanderer to need medical attention following an incident. Through the use of a 1-800 number, Medic Alert + Safe Return provides the member's personal health record, lists medical conditions, medications and allergies and can be updated 24-hours a day through a private online account or by calling the toll free number during business hours.

To learn more about Medic Alert + Safe Return, contact the Alzheimer's Association Colorado Chapter at 303-813-1669 or www.alz.org/co or Medic Alert at 888-633-4298 or www.medicalert.org

Colorado Life Track Program

Colorado Life Track provides peace of mind for family members and caregivers. Its equipment is designed to be an additional aid to help locate missing persons, providing law enforcement personnel with additional technology in locating a registered program participant.

Participants of Colorado Life Track must suffer from a disorder that may prohibit him or her from communicating personal information, such as where they live, or their name. If a participant (applicant) should become lost or are missing, the Sheriff's Department and emergency response personnel will engage special tracking devices to help isolate the location of the transmitter (wristband worn by applicant). The goal is to locate the signal as quickly as possible, minimizing risk of injury or harm to the participant.

There is an application process for this program, as well as a monthly maintenance fee to cover cost of replacement batteries and band, for those able to pay.

Contact the Douglas County Sheriff's Department for more information:

www.dcsheriff.net/support/documents/ColoradoLifeTrackProgramContract.doc

303-660-7505