

Planning, preparation may head off problems in an emergency

I can hear someone saying, **“It has never happened to me,” “I will not have to evacuate,” or “I know where everything is.”** When you are caring for someone who may not be competent to assist with evacuation preparations, you must be prepared and ready prior to the emergency, whatever that emergency may be.

Because we live in Florida, we think of hurricanes as the most likely cause for evacuation. Anything that will remove you from your place of safety, routine that is familiar, and comfort can be an emergency to a person living with Alzheimer’s and dementia.

Remember, when you are stressed and overwhelmed, so is your person with dementia. This is why being prepared is so important; so that when it happens you can focus on your loved one, and not what you may have forgotten.

Here are some of the things you should take care of prior to an emergency:

- If an option of staying with family or friends during evacuation, be sure this is agreed upon and prepared in advance.
- If a shelter is the only option, call local county services to register in a “special needs shelter” (they normally open these shelters before others).
- Wherever you plan to evacuate, don’t wait until the last minute. The longer you wait, the more hectic the situation may become.
- You should take copies of all legal paperwork with you, such as medical information, power of attorney, insurance papers, and a list of emergency contacts numbers. I know caregivers who keep such documents in the glove box of their car, which is a good idea.
- Have a three day supply of medications and don’t forget to update the medications in the kit.
- Have three days of clothes (easy on and off). To reduce confusion for your loved one, the clothes should be comfortable and familiar to them.
- Have incontinence supplies, if needed.
- If they wear eyeglasses, have a spare pair for the kit.
- If they require oxygen, take a spare tank.

- Bottled water and even some of their favorite snacks and drinks should be included.
- Have a current picture with name, address, and other important information written on the back.
- Flashlights, radio, and batteries should be included.
- Necessary toiletry items, and include hand cream which can be used to sooth and calm a person.
- Simple activities such as cards, puzzles, board games, and books (coloring).
- Have an ID on your loved one, such as a bracelet or pendant. The Alzheimer's Family Organization has a "wanderer's bracelet or pendant." If you do not have one, call 352-616-0170.
- Scent Kit with your loved ones pure scent, in an unfamiliar place and out of their normal routine they may wander away. The Alzheimer's Family Organization can assist you with this.
- You may find that an iPod with their favorite music will bring them comfort.
- Making sure they have a place to lie down and nap when needed.
- If they have a favorite item, such as a blanket or pillow.
- If your person is a resident in a care community, ask about their disaster and evacuation plans.

This may sound like a lot to most caregivers, but preplanning for unexpected events is the best thing. You may consider doing this at a time when your person is not watching, which could cause anxiety. Then put your kit somewhere for safe keeping.

Preparing a kit will give you time to think through your needs when you are not under pressure. I promise, if you try to collect what you need under the pressure of an imminent evacuation or emergency, you will certainly forget important items.

Relocating your loved one from home in an emergency will possibly cause behavior issues, wandering that you have not experienced. You will need to stay as calm as possible, hold hands, speak calmly, validate and reassure that you are with them. Be educated on how to re-direct, try to avoid noisy places, and remind them you are there for them.

Being prepared is the best way to turn an emergency into a manageable situation.

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