



Understanding wanting to leave or go home

Many people living with dementia experience changes in behaviour. Understanding the causes of these changes can help you respond.

What is wanting to leave or go home?

Wanting to leave or wanting to go home is very common in people living with dementia. This is also known as absconding or elopement.



What are the physical signs of wanting to leave or go home?

You may see people trying to:

- Go out a door
- Looking for the way out of their home or aged care home
- Asking people, “how do I get out?”
- Constant pacing or following visitors
- Going into other people’s rooms
- Going through other people’s drawers
- Trying to leave
- Exit seeking

They can become very distressed if redirected by someone or told they can’t go out.

Why do people living with dementia experience wanting to leave or go home?

When a person living with dementia doesn't recognise their surroundings or the people around them, they may want to leave.

There are a number of reasons why people living with dementia are exit seeking.

The person may:

- Be trying to go home. It may be they do not recognise the environment as their home
- Think they have a task or activity they have to do and need to leave
- Be unhappy or uncomfortable in their environment
- Be bored or lonely
- Be trying to avoid over or under-stimulation such as a noisy or busy care environment
- Have wayfinding difficulties
- Mistakenly entering other person's room while trying to find where they want to be

What can I do to help?

- Store items such as keys, coats, handbags, and suitcases out of sight.
- Ask the person where and why they want to go. Give them time to talk and reassure them about their wishes and concerns.
- Try to redirect the person's attention to something that they enjoy.
- Think about the environment the person is in: has it changed recently? Are there ways to make it feel more familiar, e.g. family photos, familiar objects or their favourite music.
- Implement a personal GPS tracking device such as a trackable watch or trackable item which can be located on their person.

This information has been compiled with the assistance of Professor Sue Kurrle, Geriatrician.

Disclaimer: This information is a guide only and is not a replacement for medical care by a qualified professional.



Is the change sudden and severe?

Is it a life threatening or emergency situation?

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