

# DISASTER PREPAREDNESS FOR DEMENTIA CAREGIVERS



Show how much you care. Be prepared.



UNIVERSITY OF  
SOUTH FLORIDA

ALZHEIMER'S<sup>®</sup>  
ASSOCIATION

# Getting Started - Assessing the Needs

## Changes in the brain of a person with dementia

Changes can begin in the part of the brain that affects learning. Over time symptoms become more severe and may include the following:

- Disorientation, mood and behavior changes
- Unfounded suspicions about family, friends and caregivers
- Difficulty speaking, swallowing and walking
- Deepening confusion about events, time and place
- More serious memory loss and behavior changes



Managing these symptoms can be difficult in an emergency. But when you plan for a disaster, like a hurricane, it makes your role as a caregiver easier.



You can get ready a little at a time. As a first step it helps to think about the needs and abilities of the person you are caring for. Your loved one may be able to help you decide how to prepare. If not, you need to make these decisions on your own. This guide can help.

**DID  
YOU  
KNOW?**

- You've probably learned that someone with dementia needs bite-sized information. It's critical to share only what information is necessary to bring comfort and manage the job at hand.
- It's important to stay calm while communicating, especially during a disaster.

**"It's easier to stay calm if you are prepared!"**

# Think about your situation and the needs and abilities of the person you provide care for



From the list below, check which disasters may occur in your area or list other emergencies that could occur.

- |                                       |                                      |                                      |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Chemical Spills | <input type="radio"/> Hurricanes     | <input type="radio"/> Utility Outage |
| <input type="radio"/> Earthquakes     | <input type="radio"/> Tornadoes      | <input type="radio"/> Wind Storm     |
| <input type="radio"/> Fires           | <input type="radio"/> Tsunamis       | <input type="radio"/> Other          |
| <input type="radio"/> Floods          | <input type="radio"/> Transportation | _____                                |
| <input type="radio"/> Heat Waves      | accidents                            | _____                                |

The next steps involve collecting the information you need and building your disaster plan. Ask yourself if your care partner can be involved and, if so, how? Even if their abilities change, involving them early can help you and them in the long run.

## You do not have to do this alone.

- Enlist family members, friends, neighbors to assist with planning and when the emergency happens.
- Asking for specific help and assigning tasks helps you organize and keep track of what is important.
- If you are in a position where there is no one to help, talk to a care provider or the Alzheimer's Association about respite care or other options to get time for yourself to plan.



# Key steps to planning ahead: A quick overview



## #1 Consider whether you should stay at home or evacuate

- Think about where you live and if your home will be safe.
- Understand that even though you may not be in an evacuation zone, you may still need to evacuate.

## #2 If you plan to stay at home

- Secure your home.
- Plan meals, including foods that don't need to be cooked and are comforting and familiar.
- Gather supplies to last at least one week.
- Plan for power loss.

## #3 If you need to evacuate

- Choose a destination.
- Write down the things you will need to have with you.

## #4 Communication tips

- Share your plans with others.
- Communicate calmly with the person you are caring for.



### Is it safer to shelter at home or to evacuate?

- If you shelter at home what do you need and for how long?
- If you evacuate, where will you go and how will you get there?
- If you evacuate, what do you need to take with you?

# Consider whether you should stay at home or evacuate

# #1

## Are you in a zone at risk of storm surge or flooding?

- The Florida Division of Emergency Management can help answer that question with its Know Your Zone search-by-address tool at [FloridaDisaster.org/KnowYourZone](https://FloridaDisaster.org/KnowYourZone) or call 850-815-4000

## How strong is your home?

- Your garage door, roof and windows are critical
- Understand your garage door's locking mechanism or how to secure the door when there is no lock.
- Have your roof inspected every five years.
- Consider installing window shutters or wind-resistant windows.

## Can you evacuate if necessary?

- Consider where to go and the type of transportation that you would use.
- Think about your loved one's ability to travel.

## When should you consider going to a shelter?

- If wind speeds are expected to be higher than than your home can sustain
- If you or the person you care for use medical equipment, are dependent on electricity and you do not have a power generator
- If you are in a flood zone but are not able to travel to another destination

## THINK ABOUT

### If you evacuate, when should you return home?

- Determine if your home and neighborhood are safe.
- Monitor the news and check with neighborhood contacts.

# Planning to shelter at home

# #2

Think about the day-to-day needs and habits of the person you care for and how to get along for at least 7 days after a disaster occurs.

## Designate a space in your home to store critical items.

### Critical items

- Cash, in case power outages prevent use of ATM and credit cards
- Medications for at least 2 weeks
- Water (at least 7 gallons per person)
- Food for at least 7 days, with a large supply of items that don't need refrigeration
  - Include comfort foods
  - Be sure to have a manual can opener
- Extra first aid, hygiene and home cleaning supplies as well as pet food and supplies
- Other critical items you may need:

## Power needs for lighting and communication

If power goes out, how will you provide light, maintain a cell phone charge, or follow the news?

- Have a battery-operated radio.
- Consider an all-in-one solar-powered/hand-crank radio that includes a USB charger and flashlight.
- Be able to light more than one room at once with multiple flashlights and/or battery-powered lanterns; avoid candles.
- Don't forget extra batteries.
- Consider extra power sources such as a power bank to charge your phone, laptop or tablet.



**THINK  
ABOUT**

*Loss of water and power interruptions could prevent you from doing laundry.*

Create a supply of clean towels and linens, as well as hygiene supplies including body wipes for bathing.

*Make and freeze meal-size servings of favorite dishes.*

Put meals in an ice-filled cooler if you lose power then heat with an outdoor grill or camp stove. This will help create a sense of normalcy.

*Keep ice packs handy to cool yourself or your loved one.*

*Plan calming activities that don't require power.*

Folding laundry, doing puzzles, playing games, etc.

# If you plan to evacuate

# #3

## Where will you go?

- Home of a relative or friend
- Hotel
- Public Shelter
- Other:

## If driving:

- Are you familiar with the route and stops on the way?
- How long will it take to get there and how much fuel will it take if you drive?
- How long is your loved one able to sit?

## Build a kit and have it ready to go.

As with your shelter at home plan, think about both your loved one's needs and yours and what you will have, or not have, at your destination.

- Medications
  - Favorite portable food and drinks
  - Cash for what you need but can't carry
  - Cellphone and charger
  - Flashlight and batteries
  - Important documents in a waterproof container or stored on your phone
  - ID (including photos) for yourself and the person you care for in case you are separated ([Medicalert.org/alz](http://Medicalert.org/alz))
  - Fresh clothing, towels and bedding if going where these will not be available
  - First-aid and hygiene supplies including personal items
  - Items, like games or a stuffed toy, for comfort and diversion
  - If you're traveling with a pet, be sure to have a carrier and supplies.
  - Other important things to take
-

# Tips to reduce wandering and anxiety



## When appropriate, share the diagnosis with others.

- Use the Companion Card: [bit.ly/CompanionCard](https://bit.ly/CompanionCard)

## Assess your loved one's response to new surroundings and reassure them.

- You may hear "I want to go home."  
Use simple statements.
  - "I know you want to go home. But for now, we need to stay here. We are safe."
  - "The doctor (or other trusted person) wants you to stay."

My companion has dementia, and may need extra help and patience. Thank you for your support and understanding.

 **ALZHEIMER'S  
ASSOCIATION**

800.272.3900  
[alz.org](https://alz.org)

## Consider reducing – but not eliminating – liquids.

- Reduce up to two hours before bedtime so the person doesn't have to get up during the night.

## Maintain routines.

- As much as possible, maintain eating, sleeping and medication routines.
- Be sure to have some of your loved one's familiar things, like a comfortable blanket.



### Special Needs Shelters

A special needs shelter provides more help than a general shelter, but many require you to pre-register every year.

To register contact your county's Emergency Management office: [floridadisaster.org/globalassets/maps/em\\_managers.pdf](https://floridadisaster.org/globalassets/maps/em_managers.pdf)

*Be aware that even special needs shelters can be crowded and noisy. You and the person you care for will have little privacy.*



# Communication tips

# #4

## Communicate your plans:

It is essential to identify people to share your plan with and to have a way to reach them, such as by phone call or text.

- Include family members, friends, neighbors, coworkers, or service providers.
- Have more than one contact, including one outside the disaster area if possible.
- Plan to be in contact immediately before and after the event.
- Consider choosing a place and time to meet after the event.

## How to communicate with the person you provide care for:

- Remain flexible and calm - a person with dementia will respond to the tone you set.
- Offer reassurance, “I will take care of you” or “we have everything we need.”
- Avoid elaborate or detailed explanations. Use concrete terms.
- Use positive statements and a patient, low-pitched voice.
- Don’t argue with or correct the person. Instead, affirm, reassure and redirect. For example, “It’s noisy here. Let’s find a quieter space to look at your photo book.”

### Key Tips

Know what provides comfort to the person you care for. Is it holding their hand, massaging their back, combing their hair? Or are they calmed by ocean sounds, music by a particular singer, looking through family photos or holding a baby doll?

**You can do this!** Being a caregiver during a disaster takes planning and preparation. But you don’t have to do it all at once. Do it in steps over time. And you don’t have to do it alone. Ask for help and advice from friends, family members other caregivers. And take care of yourself. Find moments to breathe and relax.

*Having a disaster plan will help you manage your responsibility as a caregiver.*

# Planning resources

Scan the QR code with your smart phone's camera to find all of these planning resource links in a digital directory.



## How to get current information about an expected hurricane

- NOAA website: [noaa.gov](http://noaa.gov)
- National Weather Service Radio: [weather.gov](http://weather.gov)

## Creating a plan

- FEMA Emergency Preparedness Checklist  
[yumpu.com/en/document/read/25678522/fema-emergency-preparedness-checklist-region-5-6](http://yumpu.com/en/document/read/25678522/fema-emergency-preparedness-checklist-region-5-6)
- Alzheimer's Association® Disaster Preparedness Checklist  
[alz.org/help-support/caregiving/safety/in-a-disaster](http://alz.org/help-support/caregiving/safety/in-a-disaster)

## Florida shelter information

- Special Needs Shelter Information by County: [floridadisaster.org/counties](http://floridadisaster.org/counties)
- Special Needs Shelter Registry: [snr.flhealthresponse.com](http://snr.flhealthresponse.com)



**911**

Call if you need emergency help.

**800.272.3900**

Call the Alzheimer's Association 24/7 Helpline for dementia care information. Ask them to walk through different ways you could handle an emergency, ([alz.org](http://alz.org)).

**800.621.3362**

FEMA helpline ([fema.gov](http://fema.gov))

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