



'Tis the Season to Bundle Up

THE SITUATION

A walk to the neighborhood grocery store may be the type of outing that your loved one looks forward to. However, even this routine errand can be dangerous for individuals with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias especially during the winter season. If left alone, they might wear inappropriate clothing, undress or wander due to confusion, poor judgment or other typical symptoms of Alzheimer's disease – leaving them at higher risk of the wintry wrath of Mother Nature. What you especially want to avoid is hypothermia, a life-threatening condition that occurs when the body loses heat faster than it can produce it. Remember, it does not have to be freezing for hypothermia to develop: mild cold, rain or wind can also prompt this. Here are some survival tips:

THE SOLUTION

- ▶ **Prepare clothing.** To assist someone with Alzheimer's disease, lay out a choice of outfits appropriate for the weather and in the order that each piece is to be put on. Use a consistent method to help the person get dressed each day.
- ▶ **Dress appropriately.** Wearing layers of loose fitting clothing traps warm air. Clothing made from wool, silk or polypropylene is more effective than cotton.
- ▶ **Cover your fingers, ears and toes.** Wear mittens rather than gloves, a hat, and boots that are waterproof and insulated.
- ▶ **Eat for heat.** Stick to a well-balanced diet and drink warm beverages like hot cocoa or tea.
- ▶ **Avoid specific beverages.** Drinking alcohol and caffeine rapidly increases heat loss.

- ▶ **Keep warm inside.** Set your thermostat to at least 68 degrees. Dress in light layers and put on socks and slippers. Wear socks and use extra blankets when sleeping. Close off rooms that are not being used to conserve heat and place towels in front of all doors to block drafts.

- ▶ **Prevent wandering.** Precautions include supervising individuals with dementia, safeguarding the environment, and outfitting the person with several forms of identification and a tracking device to ease and speed search efforts.
- ▶ **Know the signs of hypothermia.** People with Alzheimer's disease may not be able to communicate discomfort or pain, so you need to look for potential symptoms. Symptoms typically develop slowly and can include tiredness, slurred words, extreme shivering, stiffness in the arms and legs, anger, confusion, pale and cold skin, a swollen face, and slow or no breathing.
- ▶ **Take action.** If you suspect hypothermia, call 911 or emergency services immediately. Try to preserve body heat by moving the person inside, wrapping him or her in a blanket or other covering, providing a warm drink, and changing the person into warm, dry clothing. Do not rub or massage his or her legs and arms; doing this may cause more harm than good.

— SAIDAH HENDERSON

PREPARE IN ADVANCE

Some prescribed and over-the-counter medications can affect body temperature and thereby increase the risk of accidental hypothermia. Talk with your healthcare provider about the effects of certain medications, especially during the cold season, and find out if any adjustments to the medication routine might be necessary.