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## When you're going the distance for caregiving

If you're caring for a loved one who lives in a distant city, you're not alone. 6.9 million Americans currently face the same struggle. Fortunately, today there are many things you can do to ensure the safety, care and comfort of your relative, whether you're an hour's drive or half a world away.

### 1. Enlist the help of others

It's very difficult to provide adequate care on your own, even when you live in the same city. This becomes even more challenging as your loved one ages or illness progresses. There are many organizations and people you can turn to for help.

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## On wandering

Wandering is one of the most hazardous situations faced by a person with Alzheimer's or dementia. It can also be one of the most stressful events faced by the person's family.

According to the Alzheimer's Association, wandering can be triggered when the person ceases recognizing familiar people and surroundings, tries following former routines such as going to work, takes medications with confusion-causing side-effects or becomes restless due to physical inactivity.

### Preventing wandering

There are several things you can do that may help make wandering less likely.

- **Keep them busy.** One of the most successful ways to prevent wandering is to keep affected people active and involved with meaningful activities that provide exercise. Create a daily

*(Continued on page 5)*

## Home Care Assistance News

- **Veterans pension home care benefits available.** There is a little known VA benefit called the "Aid & Attendance" pension. The VA does not advertise this pension benefit. Contact Home Care Assistance and we can help you determine if you qualify.
- **Home Care Assistance celebrates the opening of our newest offices!**
  - Nashville, TN
  - Bucks and Philadelphia Counties, PA
  - Chester & Montgomery County, PA
  - Pittsburgh, PA
  - Dallas and Fort Worth, TX
  - Birmingham, AL

*Long-Distance Caregiving (continued):*

- **Your loved one's friends, doctors and trusted neighbors.** Meet them or call them and tell them the situation. Many will volunteer outright to help or at least keep an eye on things for you. Make sure they know how to reach you if they notice a problem. You may even want to contact them on a regular basis so they know you have things under control.
- **Your family.** Talk with other family members about what tasks can be shared or delegated. It may be that the relative who lives closest to your loved one in need may not be able nor be the best primary caregiver. At least discuss how others could adapt their schedules to give the primary caregiver an occasional respite. However, some relatives may be downright unsuitable. So, to avoid the risk of problems, don't pressure others to share caregiving duties. There are other ways they can help.

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## Statistics from the MetLife® Survey on Long Distance Caregiving:

- Number of Americans caring for a distant relative: **6.9 million**
- Average distance between elders and their caregivers: **450 miles**
- Percentage of long distance caregivers who are the primary caregiver: **26%**
- Long distance caregivers who also work full or part time: **80%**
- Average travel and out-of-pocket expenses: **\$392/month** (2004 figures)
- Gender of long distance caregivers: **60% women/40% men**

## Caregiver spotlight

After graduating from college with a degree in Business Management, Vanessa Valerio began working at a bank, where she soon felt personally unfulfilled. Her mother was a nurse and invited her to the Bay Area, suggesting caregiving as a great career in which she could



*Caregiver of the Month:  
Vanessa Valerio*

help others and feel good about herself. Her sister was already a caregiver for Home Care Assistance and it didn't take long for Vanessa to fall in love with caregiving herself.

In her past four years at Home Care Assistance, Vanessa has enjoyed many adventures, even accompanying her high profile clients on vacations on yachts and private jets. There have been difficult times as well, but as Vanessa advises, you can't get mad and you can't get sad; you just have to adapt.

***"I feel like this is a calling. I love taking care of people. It's not just a job," says Vanessa. "I help them feel comfortable and I learn great things from them in return."***

Now Vanessa is studying to become a registered nurse like her mother, so she can bring even more care to people who need it.

"My Mom is my idol," Vanessa notes. "I see how she devotes herself to others."



*Long-Distance Caregiving (continued):*

- **A Geriatric Case Manager.** You might consider hiring a licensed geriatric case manager based in the same city as your distant loved one. A professional GCM can efficiently keep tabs on your relative once a month and call you with updates and recommendations.
- **Home Care Assistance.** There's no better way to ensure your loved one has round-the-clock help and monitoring than to hire a reliable, experienced and trustworthy caregiver. Even a part-time caregiver can give you or your primary caregiver a much-needed break on occasion—or handle mundane tasks like driving your loved one on errands so you don't have to take a day off work to fly down and drive your mom to a weekly appointment.



*Visits from a geriatric case manager, a caregiver or a neighbor can fill the gaps when you're away.*

Home Care Assistance also gives you the peace of mind knowing that 24 hours per day, 7 days a week, **you can call and talk to a live case manager**—not simply an answering service, but an actual, experienced caregiver—to help you manage urgent scheduling matters.

**2. Prepare yourself**

Preparation and planning are key to making the most of your time when you're with our loved one or providing adequate care while you're apart. When you visit, decide on priorities, such as medical appointments or home safety improvements. Leave other tasks for another visit.

- **Medications.** Make (and update) a list of prescriptions and over-the-counter

medications your loved one is taking, including doses and schedules. This information is essential in an emergency and can also make things easier if/when you hire a caregiver to visit.

- **Senior resources.** Check with a library or senior center or your loved one's local place of worship for lists of services or resources you can turn to for help. You can also search online. At **HomeCareAssistance.com**, we even have a handy Resources page, with up-to-date links to many nationwide centers for aid and information.

- **Home hazards.** When you visit, go through the house and look for possible hazards and correct them. These include rugs that slide, inadequate lighting, cords, loose tiles and other clutter that could cause a slip, trip or fall. You should also install safety

devices including grab bars and raised toilet seats in the bathroom and handrails in the hallway and stairway.

- **Food and supplies.** Make sure your loved one has plenty of staple foods in the refrigerator and canned goods in the cupboards, especially if your loved one cannot get to the store without help. Toilet paper, detergent, spare light bulbs and other household necessities, as well as emergency items like flashlights, should also be kept on hand and within easy reach.

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### Long-Distance Caregiving (continued):

- **Financial, health and legal documents.** Check to see if bills are being paid or if mail is piling up. Long-distance caregivers need to have information about a parent's personal, health, financial, and legal records, organized and up-to-date. Ask your relative if he or she has an Advance Care Directive document stating his or her health care treatment preferences. If not, talk about setting one up. Make sure you and the doctor have a copy.

When visiting, also remember to actually spend quality time with your relative. Engage in fun activities not related to caregiving. On every visit, try to find the time to do something simple, entertaining or relaxing together.

### 3. Keep in touch

When you're out of physical reach, it's more important than ever to maintain contact—by telephone or email.

- **Conference calls.** To keep up-to-date with a parent's health and well being, many families schedule conference calls with doctors, a geriatric case manager and/or a caregiver.
- **Mobile phone.** You can help your parents stay in contact with you by giving them a cell phone (and then teaching them how to use it). You can even program telephone numbers into your parent's phone, for speed-dial access to doctors, neighbors, you and other contacts.
- **Personal phone book.** Create a list of helpful phone numbers, including grocery delivery services, reliable plumbers and other services and senior resources in your parent's neighborhood. Also make sure both you and your parent have a current copy of the phone book and yellow pages for your parent's city or town, so you can look up things for them.

### 4. Take care of yourself

With the hectic pace of caring for a loved one, there are things you can do to make your own life easier.

- **Keep others in the loop.** A few days before departing to care for a distant family member, tell a friend or a select neighbor that you'll be traveling. Give them your contact information and ask them to keep an eye on your own home while you're away. If going away for a long period, you may even want to have your mail and newspaper deliveries held or canceled.
- **Take time out to relax.** Take a walk, talk with your friends, get plenty of sleep, go to the gym, see a movie or go out for a nice dinner.
- **Consider joining a caregiver support group.** You can visit meetings in your community or even online. Meeting other caregivers can help you feel less isolated and give you an opportunity to ask questions and exchange ideas.
- **Give yourself a break.** Ask other family members to fill in for you. Or even better, hire a respite caregiver in your loved one's city. With more than 35 offices and growing, you may even find a Home Care Assistance caregiver nearby. You can find out by visiting [www.HomeCareAssistance.com](http://www.HomeCareAssistance.com) and typing your relative's zip code in the handy ZIP Code search function at the top of our home page.

Finally, remember that giving your relative the best care possible does not mean that you have to do it all yourself. Sometimes the best care is given by other people who are less emotionally tied to the outcome. Plus, parents may respond better to some requests when they're made by someone other than their children or relatives.

**Wandering (continued):**

routine, such as helping perform simple household chores or preparing meals. Taking walks together or even dancing is another way to exert restless energy.

- **Meet their needs.** It's also important to make sure their needs are met for food and comfort. Regularly ask if they are hungry or need to visit the restroom. Try to reduce noise levels and outside distractions as much as possible. Such attention gives people less reason to wander for relieving their personal needs, curiosity or anxiety. Keeping interior rooms brightly lit, especially at sundown, can also have a calming effect.
- **Monitor medications.** Speak to your relative's doctor about what medications might be contributing to wandering behavior. You can also ask whether other medicines might actually help reduce wandering. In severe cases, tranquilizer and antipsychotic drugs have been used to control wandering. However, drugs may have serious long-term side effects and in the end may only be modestly effective.
- **Be skeptical of alternatives.** Many people have turned increasingly to drug-free but unorthodox ways to prevent wandering, such as music therapy, aromatherapy, acupuncture and even multicolored lights.

Unfortunately, "There is no robust evidence so far," to recommend any of these alternatives, according to Dr. Louise

Robinson of the University of Newcastle and her colleagues. Published in the international medical journal, *Health Technology Assessment*, the 2006 study found nothing to indicate that any of the interventions tested really work.

**Wander-proofing the home**

Planning, diligence and prevention remains your best route to protecting your loved one.

- **Locks of love.** You can help prevent Alzheimer's sufferers from unsafely exiting the house by installing door and window locks they can't open or by placing locks out of sight and reach, either very high or very

low. You can also use a double-bolt door lock that opens from the inside with a key, but keep the key handy in case there is an emergency.

- **Beware of stairs.** Especially make sure all the doors leading to any stairs are closed and locked so they can't open a door and fall down the stairs.

**Stay out of the kitchen.**

Walking into a kitchen and turning on a stove can be disastrous for a person with Alzheimer's or dementia. If you can't keep someone from gaining access to the kitchen, you may be able to remove knobs or disconnect the power or gas.

- **Go high-tech.** You can also install electronic devices such as motion-sensitive buzzers or bells to signal when a door is opened. Or place one beside their bed to alert you to their movement.

**Safe Return**

A service of the Alzheimer's Association, the Safe Return program uses a nationwide identity registration database to assist in the identification and safe return of individuals with Alzheimer's Disease. You can register for this program by calling **1-888-572-8566**, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Or visit the Alzheimer's Association's website at <http://www.alz.org>.



### Wandering (continued):

- **Establish a perimeter.** Plant hedges or build a fence around your patio or yard and be sure to place locks on any gates.

### Involve the neighbors and the police

Educate trusted neighbors about the Alzheimer's condition and ask them to call you immediately if they see your loved one outdoors alone. Also tell the local police about his or her wandering potential. The Alzheimer's Association has a national Safe Return program that helps police locate and return someone who gets lost while wandering.

### Prepare for a wandering incident

Despite the best of your precautions, your loved one may still find a way to wander away. Before that happens, there are several things you should do.

- **Supply identification.** Buy a medical bracelet or necklace that says something like, "I am an Alzheimer's patient. Please call my family immediately at..." You can also place labels inside clothing and make sure they have an identification card in their wallet, along with your contact information and a list any medications/dosages they may require. (Post-registration materials for Safe Return include several such ID items.)
- **Keep current information on hand.** Keep handy a list of the person's age, height, weight, hair color, blood type, eye color, allergies and medical conditions.

Make multiple copies of a recent close-up photograph, so you can distribute it to police and other searchers. Also list familiar places the person may go, such as shops, walking routes and former neighborhoods. You may even want to keep some unwashed items of clothing with the person's scent to help trained dogs assisting with a search.

- **Tracking devices.** Satellite-aided tracking devices are also available, including GPS-

enabled mobile phones. However, the *Health Technology Assessment* study noted that people with dementia were concerned that mobile phone tracking might be embarrassing or hard to use. Researchers found patients preferred more traditional ways of tracking.

"For example, participants felt they would be happy to carry identity cards, because they were used to carrying them during the Second World War," Dr. Robinson said.

## Senior care news

### SENIOR ALERT! Tax Rebate Scammers Targeting Senior Citizens

Scam artists are currently using fake emails and phone calls—supposedly from the IRS—in an attempt to steal victims' personal financial information, under the guise of economic stimulus refunds that will soon be sent to taxpayers. Senior citizens, in particular, are their prime targets. The goal of the scams is to trick people into revealing personal and financial information, such as Social Security, bank account or credit card numbers, which the scammers can use to commit identity theft after emptying their financial accounts.

**Remember:** The IRS does not gather direct deposit information by telephone. The IRS also does not send unsolicited, tax-account related e-mails to taxpayers. If you receive such an email, forward it to [phishing@irs.gov](mailto:phishing@irs.gov).