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Winter Safety Tips for Caregivers Supporting Someone Living with Alzheimer's or Dementia

Winter weather conditions -- colder temperatures, snow and ice and early darkness -- can be challenging and stressful for the more than 16 million people caring for loved ones living with Alzheimer's or dementia. The current COVID-19 crisis is adding even more complexities that can feel overwhelming for caregivers.

What may seem like common safety tips, may be difficult for those living with dementia to practice. The Alzheimer's Association Wisconsin Chapter offers some safety tips for caregivers navigating the winter season:

- **Prevent Wandering.** Wandering is one of the most frequent and challenging problems that caregivers face and can be extremely dangerous in cold conditions. Shorter days during winter months can also increase the risk of "sundowning" Monitor closely for agitation or restlessness as day transitions to night.
- **Plan appointments around weather.** Winter storms can be dangerous. Check weather conditions regularly and have emergency plans in place. Consider rescheduling appointments if there is inclement weather.
- **Make daylight last.** Winter months bring decreased sunlight and shorter days. Visual perception is already a challenge for those living with Alzheimer's or other dementias, and can cause increased confusion or disorientation in dark or shadowy environments both inside and out. Consider light timers to come on before dark sets in.
- **Keep Rooms Warm.** Keep occupied rooms at a comfortable warm temperature to reduce agitation in your loved one.
- **Promote movement.** Winter months make outdoor activity difficult. Make activities a part of your day, especially ones that promote movement and inspire purpose. Consider playing cards, crafts, light sweeping, baking cookies or even having a walking path in the house.
- **Bundle up.** Help the person living with Alzheimer's dress warmly for winter weather conditions by wearing dry, loose-fitting layers and covering exposed skin.
- **Prevent slips.** Balance and mobility can be a challenge for a person living with Alzheimer's or dementia. Assume all surfaces are slick; assist the person by taking smaller steps and slowing down, so they can match gait and speed to a safer level.
- **Buddy Up.** Ask family, friends and neighbors for help with shoveling, grocery shopping or other errands. An Alzheimer's Association survey says 84% of caregivers would like more support providing care for someone with Alzheimer's or dementia, especially from their family.
- **Reach out for Support.** The Alzheimer's Association offers a 24/7 Helpline 800.272.3900 to support caregivers and families. Professionals are available to offer tips and troubleshoot challenges.

About the Alzheimer's Association

The Alzheimer's Association is the world's leading voluntary health organization in Alzheimer care, support and research. Our Mission: the Alzheimer's Association leads the way to end Alzheimer's and all other dementia - by accelerating global research, driving risk reduction and early detection, and maximizing quality care and support. Our vision is a world without Alzheimer's and all other dementia. For more information, visit www.alz.org

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