

Memory Disorder? Alzheimer's? Plan Ahead for Weather Emergencies

Planning ahead is especially important for anyone with changes in memory function, especially if a careful medical evaluation has resulted in a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease or a related disorder. When harsh weather is approaching, people with Alzheimer's disease or one of the other more than 200 different kinds of progressive memory and thinking disorders are especially vulnerable. The stress of an approaching weather emergency may result in the person with the Alzheimer's diagnosis functioning more poorly, worried that the approaching hurricane, tornado, or heavy winds and rain dangers have already arrived. The increased stress may impact the family caregiver's ability to deal with the heavy load of double responsibility and decrease the ability to form plans with immediate steps to keep the loved one, themselves, and pets safe.

News of a powerful storm heading toward one's home can easily increase release of the stress hormone, cortisol. As cortisol is released throughout the body, the brain has reduced abilities in memory, communication, and executive functions such as thinking, paying attention to important points, inhibiting unwanted behaviors, planning, problem solving, and judgment. Thus, the ability to plan and reason out the necessary steps to stay safe decreases. For these reasons, Planning Ahead becomes extra important.

Planning Ahead

Planning Ahead should consider two possibilities:

- 1) A plan when staying at home is safe and...
- 2) A plan when leaving home is best.

Plan When Staying at Home is Safe.

If staying at home appears safe, the At-Home Plan should include having 3-4 days of extra supplies just in case the electricity and plumbing stop working. For example, have available:

- Extra bottles of water to drink or use for washing up
- Extra batteries for a clock, flash light, radio, hearing aids, etc. (Note: a self-charging, hand-crank radio or flashlight does not use batteries but uses arm "winding-up" energy)
- Nutritional snacks (nonperishable)
- Medicines for a week (organized in a medicine dispenser)
- Important papers in a protected place such as a safety deposit box in a bank with copies available at home in a plastic waterproof container (copies of: legal and financial papers, insurance, retirement benefits, summary of medical conditions, medicines, etc.)

Plan When Leaving Home is Best.

If your home is in the path of a severe storm, it may be safest to leave home and drive to the home of a relative or friend or to a community shelter.

Regular Community Shelter: Ahead of time, contact the community shelter to ask if they welcome people with a memory disorder such as Alzheimer's disease or related disorder. If you decide during a weather emergency to go to a shelter, go **early** to settle in a back corner near the restrooms, but away from (or not facing) distractors that may increase anxiety, restlessness or an anger or fear reaction. In other words stay away or face away

from the windows, entrance doors, exits, the front check-in desk or station, the kitchen, and other busy areas.

Some people with Alzheimer's disease or a related dementia may find the distractions in a community center shelter to be entertaining. They should be located at the less-trafficked area of the room, but facing the activities. The family caregiver should watch the loved one for fatigue or restlessness which may indicate that it is time to change to a more restful view or area of the shelter.

Special Needs Shelter: To locate the closest Special Needs Shelter, phone 1-800-96-ELDER (1-800-963-5337). Both the person with the Alzheimer's disease or related disorder and the caregiver **must PRE-REGISTER** to use a Special Needs Shelter, if they have Alzheimer's disease or a related cognitive disorder or need:

- assistance evacuating from the home
- electricity for life sustaining equipment
- oxygen
- refrigeration for medicines or special nutrition
- help with mobility

Further information at: <http://elderaffairs.state.fl.us/doea/disaster.php>

Read the guide, Florida Disaster Preparedness Guide for Elders at: http://elderaffairs.state.fl.us/doea/pubs/EU/disaster_guide.pdf

Leaving Home In Weather Emergency? TAKE:

ID bracelet or necklace: ID info in the person's pocket, wallet, purse, clothing, etc.

Water (1 gallon a person for at least 3 -5 days)

Food: snacks (at least a 3-day supply of non-perishable, easy-to-eat food; canned food & juice; non-electric can opener); plastic bags for trash

Radio (hand-crank radio) (National Weather Service for news)

Flashlight with extra batteries or hand-crank flashlight

Medical summary (1 page): chronic & acute conditions; allergies

Medicines (7-day supply; laminate list of medicines, dose amounts & times); bring extra oxygen or special supplies, hand sanitizer, wipes; doctor contact information

First aid kit, extra hearing aid batteries, small sewing kit (extra safety pins), small tool kit or multi-purpose tool

Personal hygiene items: favorite hand soap & body lotion; extra incontinent undies; extra clothes; comfortable, flat shoes

Copies of important papers (in waterproof container): health summary (one page), recent picture ID (extra small IDs with care receiver and caregiver info), emergency contact information, proof of address, deed/lease to home, social security card, passport, birth certificates, health & life insurance policy numbers

Cell phone with charger

Extra cash (not too much & no bills higher than \$20) & travel wallet/purse (wear on shoulder or waist under clothes)

Pet supplies (collar, leash, food, carrier, bowl, plastic bags for waste)

Insect repellent and **sunscreen**

Blanket, pillow (neck pillow), special quilt

Paper & pencil/pen; distractors (i.e., books, photo albums, recorded music, etc.)

Caregiver information & 2ndary caregiver backup person (& contact information)

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