

### Safer Walking / *Te Hīkoi Kia Haumaru*

Walking is an enjoyable activity and part of everyday life. Walking enables us to connect with people and places, carry out tasks and keep fit.

Walking is the term used in this information sheet rather than 'wandering'. Wandering suggests an aimless activity, walking around often has a purpose.

Walking benefits people with dementia. However, there is risk of getting lost or injured when awareness of location and finding the way home again is affected.

Balancing safety for people with dementia, along with the need for independence and choice, is complex as people's abilities change over time. How these tensions are resolved will depend upon the environment in which walking takes place and, families/whānau and carers support in finding ways to walk safely.

#### **Why might people with dementia walk around? | He aha e hīkoi haere ai te hunga kua pāngia e te mate wareware?**

There could be a number of reasons why a person with dementia walks around. If there is a change from normal walking habits try keeping a journal for a couple of weeks - record when walking takes place and any reasons why. Identify triggers or reasons for walking to help work out how safe walking can be supported.

When there is a sudden change in behaviour check with the doctor if needed to rule out health issues such as pain, discomfort or clinical anxiety/agitated depression. If the person is more confused than usual it might be as a result of an underlying illness.

Possible reasons to walk around include:

- continuing a habit of regular walking
- feeling lost or unsettled in a new place
- feeling bored and needing to keep occupied
- using up energy
- searching for people or places that are part of the past
- responding to anxiety
- getting confused about the time- day and night

#### **Supporting safe walking | Te tautoko i te hīkoi haumaru**

Encourage movement and exercise. Do not limit the urge to walk. Instead find a way to walk safely. Approaches will depend on environmental risk (e.g. the risks of a busy city location compared to a small community where the person is well known), the person's abilities to cope and communicate, and the ability to modify triggers to walking.

Strategies for reducing risk include:

- Have a family/whānau discussion about supporting safe walking as part of advanced support planning after the diagnosis of dementia. Work together to support safe walking habits before there is a risk of getting lost.

Strategies for reducing risk continued:

- Develop regular routes that the family/whānau know well and how long they take. Encourage walking during the day rather than in the evening, wear suitable shoes, and walk with a companion or group.
- Carry identification with the name and phone number of someone who can be contacted. An identity bracelet can be worn. Consider completing a **safe walking profile**.
- Consider a locator device such as a mobile phone with a GPS function, or specialised devices using GPS or radio frequencies. See **WanderSearch** for a simple NZ radio frequency tracking system or **Safer Walking technology**. Your local Alzheimers/ Dementia organisation can provide information about available technology.
- Encourage usual activities such as gardening, housework, hobbies and recreational interests.
- When there is a risk of getting lost avoid triggers that may encourage walking alone. Keep coats, bags, umbrellas and the dog lead out of sight. Outside doors can have a bell/buzzer which sounds when the door is opened. An approach that suits the person with dementia is important-talk to your local Alzheimers/Dementia organisation about options.
- Avoid confronting the person with dementia if they really want to leave and cannot go alone as this will upset both of you. Help with suitable clothing and walk together until the focus can be shifted on to going home. Do take your mobile phone in case you need a lift home.
- Let people you trust in your neighbourhood know when getting lost becomes a concern and give them your contact number so they can keep a look out.

**If a person with dementia goes missing:**

- Try not to panic.
- Make a thorough search of the house, surrounding area, and known routes. Notify your neighbours and ask if anyone has seen the missing person.
- Contact your local ambulance and hospitals in case they have picked up the person and are caring for them.
- If there is an immediate life risk to the person (i.e., extremes of weather / poor health) OR if you are unable to find them in the immediate neighbourhood within 15-20 minutes, call 111 and ask for Police.
- Important questions the Police may have, include providing a good description of the person, information about past walking, or where the person may have gone, e.g. old neighbourhoods, former workplaces or favourite places.
- Police will arrange for local taxis and public transport to keep a lookout for the person.
- Providing a recent photo of the person will be useful for Police and other searchers.
- Leave someone at home to answer the phone while you search.
- Often people who are still traffic safe follow the same route when out walking. If you know this route and they are longer than expected it may help lessen the search time as you will know the time they normally take and the routes they follow.

## Ki te ngaro tētahi tangata kua pāngia e te mate wareware

- Kaua e pōnānā
- Kimihia te tangata i te whare katoa, i ōna taha i waho, me ngā huarahi e mōhiotia ana e ia. Whakamōhiotia ō hoa noho tata, pātai atu mehemea kua kitea te tangata ngaro.
- Whakapā atu ki te tari waka tūroro o tō takiwā me ngā hōhipera, pātai atu mehemea kua kitea te tangata e rātou, e tiakina ana hoki e rātou.
- Mehemea he mōrea ohotata ki te oranga o te tangata (arā, he rā tino kino i waho / e hē ana rānei te tinana) ki te kore rānei e kitea e koe i te takiwā tūtata ki te kāinga i muri i te 15-20 meneti, waea atu ki 111 ka tono ai kia kōrero ki ngā Pirihimana.
- Tērā pea ko ētahi pātai hira a ngā Pirihimana ki a koe, kia hoatu he whakamārama mō te āhua o te tangata, ētahi kōrero hoki mō ōna ara hīkoi i ngā rā ki muri, te wāhi pea kua haerea e te tangata. Hei tauira, ko ngā takiwā noho o mua, ngā wāhi mahi o mua, ngā wāhi kaingakau rānei.
- Mā ngā pirihimana e whakarite kia kimihia te tangata e ngā tēkihi me ngā pahi, tereina hoki o te takiwā.
- He whai tikanga hoki te hoatu i tētahi whakaahua āhua hou o te tangata mā ngā Pirihimana, me ērā atu kairapu.
- Me waiho tētahi tangata i te kāinga kia whakautu i te waea i a koe e rapu ana.
- Ko ngā tātanga he haumaruru tonu ā rātou tikanga hīkoi, ka ū tonu ki taua ara ina haere rātou ki te hīkoi. Ki te mea e mōhio ana koe ki tēnei huarahi, ā, he roa kē atu rātou i tāu i tūmanako ai, ka iti iho pea te roa o te rapunga, nā te mea, kua mōhio kē koe ki te wā ka pau i a rātou i taua hīkoi, me ngā pokanga tika ka whāia e rātou i te ara.

### When the missing person is found Ina kitea te tangata ngaro

- Don't fuss. Reassure. Remain calm.
- Join them - walk with them and
- Gradually move in the direction of home.
- If you are in a car, offer the person a lift.
- Don't forget to notify all possible 'searchers' when the person has been found, including the police.

For support and more information you can contact your local Alzheimers or Dementia organisation, or ring 0800 004 001, or visit [www.alzheimers.org.nz](http://www.alzheimers.org.nz)

This information sheet provides a general summary only of the subject matter covered and is not a substitute for informed professional advice. Any person with dementia or their carer or family/whanau should seek professional advice about their individual situation. Alzheimers New Zealand is not liable for any error or omission in this publication, as a result of negligence or otherwise. This information sheet was produced in September 2019.