

# Caregiving Tips on Disaster Preparedness

## *Disaster Preparedness for Dementia Caregivers*

*By Staff Blogger/ July, 2019*

In light of the recent earthquakes in California, we'd like to discuss disaster preparedness to make sure you've taken the proper safety measures to help protect you and your loved ones. It is especially crucial for caregivers of people with Alzheimer's disease to have a disaster plan in place to accommodate for any special needs in case of an emergency.

### **Gathering Supplies**

Generally, you should pack a disaster kit that will provide the necessary resources and provisions for you and your family for 3 to 7 days. It is also important to have supplies and backup options in case you lose access to basic necessities like water or electricity. Here are potential supplies to put in your disaster kit, with special attention to someone with Alzheimer's or dementia:

- Incontinence undergarments, wipes, and lotions
- A pillow, toy, etc. that the person can hold onto
- Favorite snacks and high-nutrient drinks
- Your physician's name, address, and phone number
- Copies of legal, medical, insurance, and Social Security information
- Ziplock bags to hold medications, documents, etc
- Recent photos of the person
- Warm clothing and sturdy shoes
- Spare eyeglasses, hearing-aid batteries, etc.
- Flashlights and extra batteries

### **If You Must Leave Home**

Leaving home to evacuate to a community shelter or someplace safe may make a person with Alzheimer's very anxious. In these times, it is imperative that you be attentive to their emotions and needs. Stay close to them, offer your hand, and give them reassuring hugs to help them endure the disorientation and discomfort that the relocation is causing them to feel. Some pointers to make sure your evacuation goes as smoothly as possible are:

- Know how to get to the nearest emergency shelters.
- If you don't drive, or if driving is dangerous, arrange for someone to transport your group.
- Make sure the person with Alzheimer's wears an ID bracelet.
- Take both your general supplies and your Alzheimer's emergency kit.
- Pack familiar, comforting items.
- If possible, plan to take along your household pet and the necessary resources.

- Save emergency numbers in your cell phone, and keep your cell phone charged
- Remember to keep your neighbors, friends, and family informed about your location.
- Try to find a quiet place if things get too noisy or chaotic.

### **If You Are Separated**

It is critical that you do all that you can to stay with a person with Alzheimer's or dementia at all times during a disaster; Never leave them alone, or expect them to stay in place and wait for you while you go get help. Separation can still happen, despite your best efforts. Prepare for possible separation during a disaster or emergency by following the steps below:

- Enroll the person with dementia the MedicAlert FOUND Program, an identification and support service for people who may become lost.
- Prepare for wandering: Place labels in garments to aid in identification, and an article of the person's clothing in a plastic bag to help dogs find them.
- Identify specific neighbors or nearby family or friends who would be willing to help make a plan of action should the person with Alzheimer's be separated.
- Give someone you trust a house key and a list of emergency phone numbers.
- Provide local police and emergency services with photos of the person with Alzheimer's and copies of his or her medical documents, and be sure they are aware of the person's needs.

We urge you to plan ahead and to take the necessary measures to ensure the safety of you and your loved ones. Organizations such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the American Red Cross also provide help in creating a general disaster plan.

For a more in-depth guide on caregiver preparedness, read through our Caregiver Notebook Guidelines. For other questions and caregiver tips, feel free to contact Alzheimer's Orange County at 844-HELP-ALZ (844-435-725)