

Tracking Devices

Alzheimer *Society*

Day-to-Day Series

Like all of us, people living with dementia have the right to move about as freely and independently as possible. At the same time, changes in the brain can affect a person's ability to find their way. Six in ten people who are living with dementia are at risk of getting lost in familiar or unfamiliar places.

A tracking device (sometimes also called a "locating device") can be a tool to help a person with dementia live as safely as possible.

What are tracking devices?

Tracking devices use technology to help find a person or object. Other features can include providing information about travel speed and time.

Questions to consider when choosing a tracking device

How do you (or the person you support) feel about using a tracking device?

Some people may think using a tracking device increases personal freedom, security and safety. Others may feel it is an invasion of privacy. If you are choosing a tracking device for someone else, consider the person's lifelong values and wishes about personal freedom, privacy, independence and safety. If you are supporting a person who may not need a device right away, talk to them about using a tracking device in the future.

Will you (or the person you support) remember to use the tracking device?

Each person living with dementia is unique, and their abilities may change over time. Similarly, each tracking device is unique – there is not one standard device that will work for every person. For any device to work well, a person must wear or carry the device with them.

Are you also considering other strategies to enhance safety?

No technology is fail-proof. For example, a tracking device may provide inaccurate readings. Or it might not work in rural or indoor areas. Also, tracking devices use a range of different technologies (see page 3 of this sheet for examples). Check that the technology of a device meets your unique needs (or those of the person you support).

Use multiple strategies to stay safe. Other strategies could include an ID card that lets others know that you (or the person you support) are living with dementia. Another could be a door alarm that notifies a caregiver when a person leaves the home.

Here are some other strategies:

- Create a safety plan, including an identification kit. The resources at findingyourwayontario.ca can help.
- Make simple changes at home to help support safety and independence. Find tips at alz.to/resourcelibrary
- Be prepared for an emergency or disaster. Guidance is available at alz.to/resourcelibrary

Note: If a person living with dementia goes missing call 911 immediately.

Choose a tracking device that fits your lifestyle

There is no one standard device that will work for every person living with dementia. New devices are released all the time and may replace current options. No matter which tracking device you choose, consider the unique needs and wants of the person using the device. Also think about the needs of those who are supporting the person. Consider these questions:

Will you know when and how to use the device?

Some tracking devices require a button to be pressed when help is needed. Will you (or the person you are supporting) know when help is needed? And how to press the button?

What level of technology are you comfortable with?

Many tracking devices are high-tech with customizable options. How comfortable are you (or the person you are supporting) with learning how to use the various features? Will you have help to set up the tracking device or if you experience technical issues?

Where will the tracking device be used?

Depending on the technology that the tracking device uses, some are more effective outdoors than others. Will the locating device be used indoors, outdoors or both?

Do you understand the tracking device features?

Alarms and call centres are some common features in tracking devices. Do you know what these features do? Can you effectively compare the options? Can you use the device properly?

WE'RE HERE TO HELP!

Speak with staff at the Alzheimer Society of Toronto to learn how a person living with dementia can live as safely and independently as possible.

Visit alz.to.

Or 416-322-6560 and info@alz.to if you need help connecting.

✓ Who will be responsible for charging the tracking device?

Most devices require daily charging. Often this means connecting the device to an electrical outlet for a couple of hours. Who will be responsible for charging the device? Who will be responsible for making sure the device is worn or carried by the person living with dementia?

✓ Does the tracking device come with monthly costs?

Besides the initial purchase cost, there might be monthly fees to keep the device active and operational. Ask about all monthly and annual fees. Some devices can be leased instead of purchased; consider your preference.

Types of tracking device technologies

GPS (global positioning system technology) uses satellite signals to find the location of the person wearing the device. **Advantage:** Most effective outdoors. Allows for a caregiver or emergency responder to locate the transmitter in real time through an internet or smartphone application. **Disadvantage:** Needs to be charged frequently.

Bluetooth low energy (BLE) proximity locators use a Bluetooth signal received by another internet-connected device to locate a transmitter. **Advantage:** Low energy drain. Batteries may last over a year. **Disadvantage:** Limited range makes it challenging to use in rural settings.

RF (radio frequency) technology uses radio signals to find the location of the person wearing the device. **Advantage:** The range of this technology is larger than that of Bluetooth, allowing for tracking up to 5 kms away. **Disadvantage:** A shorter range than GPS. Most effective indoors.

If the person lives in long-term care or another type of assisted-living community, check with the home's administration to learn more about other types of security systems, such as video or sensors.

The checklist on the next page provides some common device features to be aware of. This will help you learn about these features so you can compare different types of devices.

Checklist for comparing tracking devices

When researching tracking devices, use this checklist to compare features and to decide which device is most appropriate for the specific needs of the person living with dementia and their caregiver(s). Review various manufacturers' websites or call the manufacturer and ask questions. Record the following information about each device:

Note: Make sure the device is available in Canada. Devices from other countries may not work in Canada.

	Device Name: Model/Product #:	Device Name: Model/Product #:	Device Name: Model/Product #:
Costs			
Device			
Activation fee			
Subscription fee			
Is additional technology needed to use the device (smartphone, computer or tablet)?			
Size and weight			
Size			
Weight			
Battery			
Is the battery rechargeable?			
How often does it need recharging?			
How does it get recharged?			
Range, accuracy and speed			
Device range (What distance does it cover?)			
Device accuracy (How accurately does it find a person's location?)			
Speed of transmission (How fast can the device send information?)			

	Product #1	Product #2	Product #3
Other questions to consider	Check if YES	Check if YES	Check if YES
Is the device available in Canada?			
Does the manufacturer have a good reputation? Look for reviews to assess the quality of the device.			
Has the device been endorsed by professionals (emergency responders or search and rescue organizations)?			
Has the device been independently tested? If yes, by whom and when?			
Does the device allow for customizable features and alerts?			
Will the device be comfortable to wear?			
Does the device fit in with the person's clothing or style?			
The device works on its own (it doesn't require additional technology such as a smartphone, computer or tablet)			
Is the device water-resistant?			
Is the device easy to set up?			
Is the device a one-time setup?			
Does the device have fall detection?			
Can the device be easily removed?			
Can the device be found easily if lost?			
Will the device send an alert if it is damaged or stops working?			
Does the device have a geo-zone feature (alerts when the person leaves or arrives a designated area)?			
Does the device work indoors?			
Does the device work outdoors?			
Will the device work if you take it out of your region or country?			
Does the device have one-way communication for monitoring? (That is, a button that connects a person to a call centre and sends an alert to a caregiver. The person and the caregiver cannot communicate directly with anyone.)			
Does the device have two-way communication for monitoring? (That is, the caregiver, the person with dementia and the call centre can all communicate directly with each other.)			

Support is available

Visit alz.to to find contact information for Alzheimer Society of Toronto. Or reach out to 416-322-6560 and info@alz.to if you need help.

Additional resources

Society of Ontario. Finding Your Way. findingyourwayontario.ca

University of Waterloo's Aging and Innovation Research Program, Alzheimer Society of Ontario and AGE-WELL NCE. Locator devices for people at risk of going missing. uwaterloo.ca/aging-innovation-research-program/locator-devices

This information is for your general use. Be sure to talk to a qualified health-care professional before making any health-related decisions. Information that the Alzheimer Society provides does not replace your relationship with your health-care professional. This information is not intended to replace clinical diagnosis or treatment.

To provide feedback on this factsheet, please email publications@alzheimer.ca

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