

Misplacing or Losing Objects

Misplacing or losing objects can cause feelings of anxiety and frustration for both the person with Alzheimer's disease and those who care for them. It can be especially troublesome when associated with suspiciousness.

Sometimes, the person may continuously and compulsively search for an item which they believe to be missing, which may not even exist.

Understanding the Symptom

The process for remembering what is lost while looking for it is somewhat complex – both for healthy persons as well as those affected by Alzheimer's disease. One must hold the image in their mind of what they are trying to find and why. Then, they must remember far enough into the past to remember the last time they used it or where they put it. When someone has Alzheimer's disease, the neurological pathways that allow for such remembering can be damaged.

Think about memory like putting things in a box. You place something in a box, you keep it there and you take it out when needed. When a healthy person misplaces an object, the problem lies in not being able to get it out of the box when needed. For the person affected by Alzheimer's disease, the memory exists in their mind initially, but is then lost; it is no longer 'in the box'.

Managing the Symptom

While this symptom can be demanding and can create a sense of helplessness for even the most devoted caregiver, there are a number of tips available to help you cope. DementiaGuide's Symptom Library takes a proactive approach to assisting you in managing repetitive questions:

- **Use visual cues.** You can help the person with dementia to get through their day with less frustration. Try placing picture labels on drawers or cupboard doors of the items inside to help remind the person what belongs there.
- **Keep irreplaceable and valuable items in secure place.** Locking such items in drawers or cabinets can help to prevent them from being borrowed and lost.
- **Engage in other activities.** Particularly when the person you care for is compulsively searching for a non-existent item, you may find it helpful to distract the person with chores, hobbies or recreational activities. This can help to reduce feelings of frustration and anxiety.
- **Have duplicates of essential items,** such as toothbrushes, keys, and pens. This will help to minimize frustration when the original item is misplaced and may help to reduce accusations from the person you care for that the item was stolen or hidden.
- **Reduce clutter.** Something as simple as clearing shelves, tables, and countertops can eliminate hiding spots and decrease the number of items that can be misplaced.
- **Provide guidance through the memory process.** Try prompting the person to describe the location or situation in which they last used the item.
- **Help to look.** Two people searching together are likely to find the misplaced item sooner, allowing you both to move on to a new activity.

About the Symptom:

A person with Alzheimer's disease or dementia might:

- Not recall using an item or forget where they placed it
- Place items in odd places or hide them from others
- Accuse others of stealing or hiding their items
- Search for items they believe are lost, or missing, which do not even exist

Doctor's Notes:

Like complaints about recent memory, the misplacing of objects is another common symptom in people who have healthy brains. When evaluating someone for whom this is a major concern, it is important to establish whether the concern is new (the longer they have had it, the less likely it is to be due to dementia), whether they misplace important objects and what strategies they employ to find misplaced objects.

Many symptoms of Alzheimer's disease reliably get better after treatment. Many experienced physicians find, however, that it is uncommon for the complaint of misplacing objects to improve, although, the suspiciousness often improves with treatment.



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