

Rummaging and Hiding Things

Someone with Alzheimer's disease may start rummaging or searching through cabinets, drawers, closets, the refrigerator, and other places where things are stored. He or she also may hide items around the house. This behavior can be annoying or even dangerous for the caregiver or family members. If you get angry, try to remember that this behavior is part of the disease.

In some cases, there might be a logical reason for this behavior. For instance, the person may be looking for something specific, although he or she may not be able to tell you what it is. He or she may be hungry or bored. Try to understand what is causing the behavior so you can fit your response to the cause.



Rummaging—with Safety

You can take steps that allow the person with Alzheimer's to rummage while protecting your belongings and keeping the person safe. Try these tips:

- Lock up dangerous or toxic products, or place them out of the person's sight and reach.
- Remove spoiled food from the refrigerator and cabinets. Someone with Alzheimer's may look for snacks but lack the judgment or sense of taste to stay away from spoiled foods.
- Remove valuable items that could be misplaced or hidden by the person, like important papers, checkbooks, charge cards, jewelry, and keys.
- People with Alzheimer's often hide, lose, or throw away mail. If this is a serious problem, consider getting a post office box. If you have a yard with a fence and a locked gate, place your mailbox outside the gate.

You also can create a special place where the person with Alzheimer's can rummage freely or sort things. This could be a chest of drawers, a bag of objects, or a basket of clothing to fold or unfold. Give him or her a personal box, chest, or cupboard to store special objects. You may have to remind the person where to find his or her personal storage place.



More Tips

Here are some more suggestions:

- Keep the person with Alzheimer's from going into unused rooms. This limits his or her rummaging through and hiding things.
- Search the house to learn where the person often hides things. Once you find these places, check them often, out of sight of the person.
- Keep all trash cans covered or out of sight. People with Alzheimer's may not remember the purpose of the container or may rummage through it.
- Check trash containers before you empty them, in case something has been hidden there or thrown away by accident.



For more caregiving tips and other resources:

- **Read** "Caring for a Person with Alzheimer's Disease": www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers/publication/caring-person-alzheimers-disease
- **Visit** www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers/topics/caregiving
- **Call** the ADEAR Center toll-free: 1-800-438-4380

The Alzheimer's Disease Education and Referral (ADEAR) Center is a service of the National Institute on Aging, part of the National Institutes of Health. The Center offers information and publications for families, caregivers, and professionals about Alzheimer's disease and age-related cognitive changes.

