Supporting a Loved One with Dementia: How Location Tracking Helps at Home

Caring for a family member with dementia at home brings many rewards, but also real challenges. One of the most worrying moments for any caregiver is the sudden realisation that their loved one has wandered off. Whether it is a short walk down the street or a longer journey that becomes disorienting, the fear of not knowing where they are can be overwhelming. Technology, particularly location tracking, offers a practical way to ease that worry while respecting the person's independence.

What Is a Senior Location Tracker?

A senior location tracker is a small device, often worn as a pendant, clipped to a belt, or kept in a pocket, that uses satellite signals and Wi-Fi positioning to determine the wearer's location. It sends that information to a paired app or web dashboard, usually on a caregiver's phone. Some models also include fall detection, SOS alerts, and two-way communication, allowing the wearer to call for help or speak with a family member directly.

These devices do not require a monthly subscription. Once you buy the hardware, it works without ongoing fees, which makes them an affordable option for families on a budget. The key is finding a tracker that fits the person's daily life and habits. If they dislike wearing anything on their wrist, a clip-on pendant might work better. If they often forget to charge a device, look for one with a long battery life or a simple charging dock.

How Location Tracking Supports Dementia Care at Home

Wandering is a common behaviour in dementia, especially in the middle and later stages. It can happen at any time of day or night. A location tracker gives you a live view of where your loved one is, so you can step in quickly if they leave a safe zone. This is not about surveillance. It is about enabling them to move freely within a known boundary, with the reassurance that help is nearby if needed.

Many trackers let you set up a geofence, a virtual boundary around the home or garden. When the wearer crosses that boundary, the device sends an alert to your phone. This means you can let them enjoy time in the backyard or a walk around the block without standing watch every second. If they wander further than expected, you receive an immediate notification and can locate them on a map.



One of the most valuable aspects of this kind of technology is that it reduces the stress on caregivers. Knowing where your loved one is, especially during the night or when you are trying to get other things done, lifts a significant mental load. It also helps prevent the escalation of a situation into a missing person response, which is distressing for everyone involved.

Practical Features to Look For

Not all location trackers are the same. When choosing a device for dementia care, consider the following features:

- Real-time GPS and Wi-Fi location: A tracker that uses both satellite and indoor Wi-Fi signals gives more accurate positioning, especially inside buildings where satellite

coverage can be weak.

- Fall detection: Many older adults are at risk of falls. A tracker that automatically detects a fall and sends an alert can be a lifesaver, particularly if the person cannot call for help themselves.
- SOS button: A simple button the wearer can press to alert you or emergency services. This is useful if they feel lost or unwell.
- Two-way communication: Some trackers have a built-in speaker and microphone, allowing you to speak directly with your loved one through the device. This can be reassuring for both sides.
- Long battery life: Look for a device that lasts at least a day or two on a single charge. Some models have rechargeable batteries that last a week or more.

The Role of Location Support in a Care Plan

Adding a tracker to your care routine is not a replacement for supervision or medical care, but it is a powerful supplement. It works best when integrated into a broader care plan that includes regular check-ins, medication management, and social engagement. The device becomes one more tool that helps you respond to changing needs.

For example, if your loved one tends to wander in the evening, you might set the geofence to the house only during those hours. During the day, you might expand the boundary to include the garden and the neighbour's fence line. The flexibility of these systems means you can adjust them as the person's condition evolves.

It is also worth discussing the tracker with the person with dementia early on, while they can still understand and agree to it. Frame it as a way to keep them safe and give you peace of mind, not as a restriction. Many people appreciate the freedom it provides, knowing that they can go for a walk without worrying about getting lost.

Location support for dementia care is not about locking someone in. It is about opening up possibilities while keeping a safety net close at hand. When used thoughtfully, it can help the person stay at home longer, surrounded by familiar people and places.



What About Privacy?

Privacy is a legitimate concern. No one wants to feel watched in their own home. The key is to use the device transparently and with the person's consent wherever possible. Explain that it only shares location data with the people they trust, and that you will check the app only when you need to, not constantly. Most trackers let you set up alerts for specific events, so you do not have to monitor the feed all day.

It also helps to choose a tracker that stores data locally or on a secure server, and that does not share information with third parties without permission. Read the privacy policy of any device you consider, and ask the manufacturer directly if you have concerns.

What to Watch Out For

No technology is perfect. Trackers can lose signal in dense urban areas, inside concrete buildings, or in remote rural spots. Wi-Fi positioning may not work well if the home has a weak network. It is a good idea to test the device in the places your loved one spends most of their time, and to have a backup plan, such as a neighbour or family member who can check in person if the tracker goes offline.

Battery life is another factor. If the device runs out of power, it cannot send a location. Set a routine for charging it, for example, overnight every night. Some trackers have a low-battery alert that notifies you before the device dies, which is a helpful feature.

Finally, remember that the person wearing the tracker may sometimes take it off or forget to put it on. This is common, especially in the early stages of dementia. Have a conversation about wearing it as a habit, and consider attaching it to something they always carry, like a keychain or a walking stick.

Bringing It All Together

Caring for someone with dementia at home is a journey full of small adjustments. Location support for dementia care is one of those adjustments that can make a big difference. It gives you the confidence to let your loved one move freely, knowing that you can find them quickly if they wander. It also reduces the anxiety that often drives families to consider residential care earlier than they would like.



When you choose a tracker, focus on the features that match your loved one's habits and your own comfort level. Test it thoroughly, talk openly about it, and adjust the settings as needed. No device can replace your care and attention, but it can certainly lighten the load.

For families in New Zealand, the Familyr tracker offers GPS and Wi-Fi location, SOS alerts, fall detection, and two-way communication without monthly fees. It is designed specifically for elderly care at home, making it a practical option for dementia caregivers who want reliable location support without ongoing costs.