

Care Partner Information

Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementia Caregiving Tips

Home Safety Issues Part III: Dementia & Guns

The combination of guns and dementia is a dangerous mix.

Many older Americans own a gun. If they develop dementia, it creates a very serious situation. People with dementia often don't realize how dangerous their guns can be. They often forget to use the basic safety procedures that they have followed for their whole life.

How does dementia affect a person's ability to safely handle guns? The table below can help explain.

Why Guns are Dangerous for People with Dementia	
Symptoms of Dementia	How it Affects Gun Safety
Memory Problems	They may forget to lock up the gun when little children are in the home.
Poor Judgment	They may use the gun on care partners or family members who might surprise them in their home or room.
Delusions or Hallucinations (seeing or hearing something that isn't real)	They may use the gun on care partners or family members if they feel threatened or scared.
Depression (or other mood problems)	They may use the gun on themselves. Americans over age 65 have the highest rate of suicide.

Over 60% of people with dementia are living in a home that has guns. Care partners may not be aware that there is a gun in the home. Families may be aware, but may not realize the dangers to themselves and others as their loved one's dementia worsens.

Therefore, the first step is to always ask if there is a gun in the home. The table on the next page lists questions to ask to help decide what to do.

This Care Partner Information page is part of a series on caregiving tips. They are written to help family and community caregivers, direct care workers and community health representatives care for someone with Alzheimer's disease or other types of dementia. Available in English and Spanish at www.aging.arizona.edu

Care Partner Information

Questions To Ask	What To Do
Do you have guns, rifles, or other weapons in the home?	Hold a family meeting to plan what to do.
Is the gun locked and put away?	Guns should be locked and stored safely.
Is the gun loaded or unloaded?	Guns should always be unloaded.
Where are the bullets?	The bullets should be stored separately, away from the gun.
Are there children present?	Guns should not be left around children.
Does the gun owner feel depressed or down?	Guns should be hidden from people who are depressed or down because of the risk of suicide.
Does the gun owner have problems with vision or hearing?	Guns should not be used by people who have trouble hearing or seeing things.

Most of the time, the gun should be removed from the home. However, if family members feel the gun is important for their own safety, they should always keep it locked with the key hidden, and keep the bullets in a separate place. And, always keep the gun away from children.

Tips to Manage Guns in the Home

Always ask if there are guns or rifles in the home.

Strongly encourage the person with dementia to remove their guns from their home.

If the person with dementia can't understand the risk, then remove the guns from the home for them, or unload them.

Remember that guns are dangerous. Don't handle a gun if you haven't been trained in firearm safety.

Only people who have been trained in gun safety should handle a gun. Although it may seem easy to unload a gun, or put it away, that's how accidents happen. Be sure that only trained people handle guns.

Remember that guns can be very dangerous in the wrong hands. People with dementia do not have the ability to safely use a gun. Do not allow people with dementia have a gun, use a gun, or even be around a gun.

Written by: Mindy J. Fain, MD, University of Arizona

Alzheimer's disease and Related Dementia ~ Care Partner Information

Edited by an interprofessional team from the University of Arizona Center on Aging,
Alzheimer's Association - Desert Southwest Chapter and Community Caregivers

This project was supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) under grant number UB4HP19047, Arizona Geriatric Education Center. This information or content and conclusions are those of the author and should not be construed as the official position or policy of, nor should any endorsements be inferred by HRSA, HHS or the U.S. Government.