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## **When a Loved One with Dementia Wants to Go Home**

Family care-givers often feel guilt or inadequacy when their loved ones with dementia say “I want to go home.” This article by Mary Ann Matteson, PhD, RN, FAAN\* addresses the reality of this situation and provides some helpful tips to make it better.

“When Your Person Says “I want to go home.”

Persons with dementia often "perseverate" about going "home" or have delusions about "home". Home can mean different things to a person with dementia. It may mean the home, a home where they lived in another stage of their life, it may mean the home they recently left or may be just an abstract concept to them. These feelings can occur in their own home or in the residential setting.

Hearing "I want to go home" can be especially hard for families to deal with, causing them to feel guilt, inadequacy, sadness, and anger. Sometimes, this is just a patient's way of coping with the loss of control associated with the disease. Home represents comfort and familiarity, and dementia patients may feel that they could be in control and function better at home even though they are not able to.

It is important to realize that the dementia patient is in the right situation. With the patient in residential care, there are many caregivers to share the burden of care rather than just one person. Care-giving at home can be such a burden that the caregiver becomes ill. Persons with dementia can outlive caregivers, losing their love and support. Try to tell yourself that your relationship with the person will be better and will benefit the Alzheimer person more because you can share quality time together.

### **DEALING WITH THE SITUATION**

- Avoid correcting persons with dementia about home or trying to provide explanations for where they are.
- Be sure that many familiar and favorite objects are close by in the environment.
- Try distraction by asking the dementia person to tell you "about home".
- Divert attention to other things.
- Come prepared to carry out an activity together, for example listening to favorite music together, watching a TV show, reading together, or looking at pictures.
- Try reminiscing with the person.
- Bring a familiar object to talk about and leave it with the person.

- Avoid greeting by asking "How are you today?" Instead, say "It's so good to see you."

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