# How to use geofence alerts to keep a loved one with dementia safe from wandering

## Understanding wandering and why a quick response matters

Wandering is one of the most worrying behaviours for families caring for someone with dementia or memory loss. A person can leave home without warning, become confused, and walk a long distance before anyone realises they are gone. The sooner someone knows the person has left, the safer the outcome. That is where geofence alerts come in. They can tell you the moment a person crosses a boundary you set, such as their home property line, so you can act fast.

This article walks through the steps to set up and use geofence alerts through an elderly GPS tracker. It explains what to check at each stage so the system works reliably when you need it most.

## Step 1: Choose a tracker and define the safe zone

The first step is making sure the device you have can create a virtual boundary around a location. Most elderly GPS trackers that are designed for dementia care include a geofence feature. The device uses GPS location data to know where the person is at all times. You decide the area that counts as safe, usually their home and garden. That area is the safe zone.

When you set up the tracker for the first time, you will need to define the boundary. In the accompanying app or web dashboard, you draw a circle or polygon on a map around the home. The size is up to you. For someone who tends to wander only a short distance, a smaller zone of a few metres around the house might be fine. For someone who enjoys a daily walk to the letterbox, you may want a larger zone that includes the driveway and front path. Watch out for making the zone too large, though. A very big safe zone can mean the person walks a long way before you get an alert. A good starting point is to match the boundary to the area you can see from a window or the area you can check in under a minute.



## Step 2: Confirm the alert method reaches you quickly

Once the geofence is drawn, you need to tell the system how to notify you. The most common way is a mobile alert sent to your phone. That could be a push notification from the tracker's app, an SMS text, or both. Some trackers also let you add secondary contacts, such as a neighbour or another family member, who will receive the same alert.

What to watch for here is that the alert method you choose is one you will actually notice. A push notification is useless if your phone is on silent or if you ignore app banners. SMS is more noticeable but can take a few seconds longer to arrive. Test the alert by walking out of the zone yourself with the tracker on. See how long it takes for the message to appear on your phone. If the delay is more than a minute or two, consider changing the alert method or

contacting the device provider for advice. You want to be confident that the system will give you alerts when someone leaves home without a long lag.

## Step 3: Teach the person about the tracker in a gentle way

Wearing a tracker can feel intrusive or confusing to someone with dementia. The best approach is to introduce the device as something helpful, not as a way to watch them. You might say it is a new watch or a safety pendant that helps everyone feel calm. Let them hold it, try it on, and wear it for short periods at first. If they remove it, try a different style, such as a pendant on a lanyard or a clip-on device that attaches to a belt or pocket.

What to watch for is resistance or confusion. If the person repeatedly takes the tracker off, check whether the strap is uncomfortable or the device is too heavy. Some people respond better to a device that looks like a regular watch rather than a medical alarm. The goal is to make the tracker a normal part of their daily routine so that the geofence works every day, not only on days they agree to wear it.

## Step 4: Set up a missing person plan for when an alert sounds

An alert is only useful if you know what to do next. Before you ever receive one, create a simple plan. When you get a notification that the person has left the safe zone, the first action is to check the GPS location shown in the app. That tells you where they are right now and lets you see if they are still moving. If they are nearby on a familiar street, you may be able to walk or drive to them quickly. If they are heading toward a busy road or an area they do not know, you may need to call for help sooner.



What to watch for is panic. It is easy to feel alarmed when the alert arrives, especially if it is the first time. Keep the plan simple: look at the location, call the person's name if they have a phone with them, and if you cannot reach them within five minutes, contact a neighbour or family member who can help. If the person has a history of wandering far or if the area is unsafe, do not hesitate to call the local non-emergency police number. Some families also keep a recent photo and a list of the person's usual walking routes ready to share with searchers.

## Step 5: Review the geofence boundaries regularly

A person's walking patterns can change over time. Someone who used to stay close to the house may start walking further as their condition progresses. Or they may begin to wander at a different time of day, such as in the early morning or late evening. It is a good idea to check the geofence settings every few months and adjust the zone if needed.

What to watch for is the person finding ways to leave the zone without triggering an alert. For example, if the boundary stops at the back door but the person leaves through the garage, the geofence might not catch them. Walk around the property yourself and note every possible exit. Then make sure the safe zone covers all of them. Also check that the tracker's battery is charged and that the device is still connected to the mobile network. A dead battery or a lost signal means no **alerts when someone leaves home** at all.

## Step 6: Practise using the geofence as a family

It helps to run through a practice scenario once or twice. Ask another family member to take the tracker and walk outside the safe zone while you watch the app. See how fast the alert arrives and whether the location shown is accurate. This test gives everyone confidence and shows up any problems with the device or the app before a real wandering event occurs.

What to watch for is that the practice does not upset the person with dementia. If they are present, explain that you are checking the device works, not testing them. Keep the tone light and matter-of-fact. After the test, talk about what went well and what could be faster. For example, if the alert came to one person's phone but not another's, adjust the contact list in the app.


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## Geofence alerts are one part of a bigger safety picture

A geofence alert gives you a crucial head start when someone wanders. But it works best when it is paired with other simple measures. Keep doors and gates secure, especially at night. Consider a door alarm that sounds when the door opens. Make sure the person always has some form of identification on them, such as an ID bracelet or a card in their pocket. And keep the tracker's app on your phone's home screen so you can find the location quickly.

No system is perfect. A tracker can lose signal in a building with thick walls or in a rural area with poor mobile coverage. That is why the missing person plan matters. The alert tells you they have left, and the plan tells you what to do next. With a little preparation, geofence alerts can give you the extra minutes that make all the difference in bringing someone home safely.