

Sundowning

It's common for people living with Alzheimer's disease to experience increased confusion, anxiety, agitation, pacing and disorientation beginning at dusk and continuing throughout the night. This syndrome is commonly referred to as sundowning. The exact cause is unknown, but there are a number of factors that may contribute to it.

Factors that may cause sundowning:

- Mental and physical exhaustion from a full day trying to keep up with an unfamiliar or confusing environment.
- Nonverbal behaviors of others, especially if stress or frustration is present, may inadvertently contribute to the stress level of person living with Alzheimer's.
- Reduced lighting can increase shadows and may cause the person living with the disease to misinterpret what they see and, subsequently, become more agitated.

Tips that may help caregivers manage sundowning:

- Get plenty of rest so you're less likely to exhibit unintended nonverbal behavior.
- Schedule activities such as doctor appointments, trips and bathing in the morning or early afternoon hours when the person living with dementia is more alert.
- Try to maintain a regular routine that includes activities the person enjoys. When possible and appropriate, include walks or time outside in the sunlight.
- Make notes about what happens before sundowning events and try to identify triggers.
- Reduce stimulation during the evening hours (i.e., TV, doing chores, loud music, etc.). These distractions may add to the person's confusion.
- Offer a larger meal at lunch and keep the evening meal lighter.
- Keep the home well lit in the evening. Adequate lighting may reduce the person's confusion.
- Do not physically restrain the person; it can make agitation worse.
- Try to identify activities that are soothing to the person, such as listening to calming music, looking at photographs or watching a favorite movie.
- Allow the person to pace back and forth, as needed, with supervision.
- Take a walk with the person to help reduce his or her restlessness.
- Talk to the physician about the best times of day for taking medication.
- When behavioral interventions and environmental changes do not work, discuss the situation with your doctor.

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