

Sundowning and dementia

Sometimes a person with dementia will behave in ways that are difficult to understand in the late afternoon or early evening. This is known as 'Sundowning'.

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Understanding sleep and night-time disturbance

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What is sundowning?

Sometimes you might see changes in the person's behaviour in the later afternoon or towards the end of the day. During this time the person may become intensely distressed, agitated and have [hallucinations](#) or [delusions](#). This may continue into the night, making it hard for them to get enough sleep.

This is sometimes known as 'sundowning' but is not necessarily linked to the sun setting or limited to the end of the day. Sundowning can happen at any stage of dementia but is more common during the [middle stage](#) and [later stages](#).

What causes sundowning?

The reasons why sundowning happens are not well understood, but it is possible that a range of different causes makes it more likely. These might include:

- tiredness, hunger, pain or other unmet physical needs
- not enough exposure to sunlight during the day
- overstimulation during the day, such as from a noisy or busy environment
- disturbance to the person's 'body clock' caused by damage to the brain
- disturbed levels of hormones that vary over the course of the day
- sensory impairment, such as [hearing or sight loss](#)
- tiredness in other people causing the person with dementia to become upset
- mood disorders, such as anxiety or [depression](#)
- fewer carers around to look after the person (in a care home)
- side effects of prescribed drugs.

Some of these are related to the time of day, and others may happen at any time. Try to identify which of these problems might be affecting the person, as each problem may need a different [treatment](#).

Tips for reducing sundowning

- Sometimes what seems like 'sundowning' could be the person trying to communicate a need. This could be needing the toilet, feeling hungry or being in pain.
- Think whether something that's happened during the day has affected them. If they seem agitated, try to calm them by distracting them, perhaps talking about a favourite memory or event they enjoy thinking about.
- If they remain agitated, it could be that they have a need that is not being met. For more information see [Communicating](#).

Read about other sleep problems

Get advice on other sleeping problems, as well as what support and care is available for a person with dementia and sleep disturbance.

Find out more

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Page last reviewed: 30 September 2021

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Categories

[Sleep](#), [Changes in behaviour](#), [Restlessness](#)

Further reading

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10 ways to make dressing easier for people with dementia



Advice

As dementia progresses, a person will need more help with everyday activities such as getting dressed. We share 10 ideas that could help make dressing easier while supporting the person's identity and personal choice.

26 June 2023

How to offer help to someone with dementia who doesn't want it

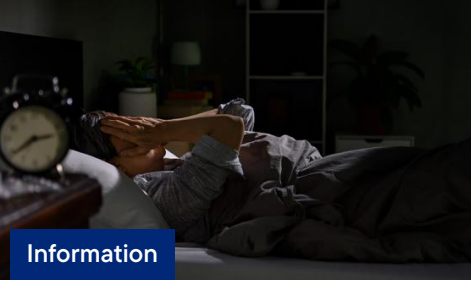


Advice

Do you know a person with dementia or memory problems who is refusing offers of help? Here are a few ways to support someone who may be in denial or lack insight about their situation.

20 March 2023

What could help you to get better sleep while caring for someone with dementia?



Information

We share tips to help carers get better sleep.

01 February 2023

My dementia diagnosis experience was abhorrent so I became a campaigner

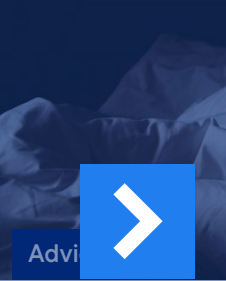


Real stories

When John was diagnosed with young-onset Alzheimer's disease, it was a huge shock to him and his family. He received little support after the news was delivered and is now campaigning to improve the diagnosis experience.

07 September 2022

Is it typical for dementia to sleep during the day



Advice

People with dementia in the later stages, a lot of time sleeping be worrying for care family. Find out why dementia might sleep average person of 11

12 May 2022

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