

Coping With Agitation, Aggression, and Sundowning in Alzheimer's Disease

[Español](#)

People with [Alzheimer's disease](#) may become agitated or aggressive as the disease gets worse. Agitation means that a person is restless and worried, and they aren't able to settle down. Agitated people may pace a lot, not be able to sleep, or act aggressively toward others. They may verbally lash out or try to hit or hurt someone. When these problems start to happen or worsen in the late afternoon or early evening, it's called sundowning. On this page, learn about the causes of agitation, aggression, and sundowning and how to manage them.

Causes of agitation and aggression

Most of the time, agitation and aggression happen for a reason. When they happen, try to find the cause, then talk with a health care provider about possible solutions. Causes of agitation and aggression can include:



- Pain, depression, or stress
- Too little rest or sleep
- Constipation
- Sudden change in a well-known place, routine, or person
- A feeling of loss – for example, the person may miss the freedom to drive
- Too much noise or confusion, or too many people in the room
- Being pushed by others to do something – for example, to bathe or to remember events or people – when Alzheimer's has made the activity very hard or impossible
- Feeling lonely and not having enough contact with other people
- Certain medications or interactions between two medications

A doctor can give the person with Alzheimer's a medical exam to look for any physical problems that may cause agitation and aggression, and in certain cases, may prescribe medication to ease the symptoms.

Tips for coping with agitation or aggression

Here are some ways you can help minimize and cope with agitation or aggression:



[Read and share this infographic](#) about how to communicate with a person who has Alzheimer's disease.

- Be patient and try not to show frustration. Speak calmly. Listen to the person's concerns and avoid arguing. Reassure the person that they are safe, and that you are there to help. Use other communication

methods besides speaking, such as gentle touching, to help them calm down. Take deep breaths and count to 10 if you get upset.

- Create a comforting home setting. Try to keep to a routine, such as bathing, dressing, and eating at the same times each day. Reduce noise and clutter. Play soothing music and keep well-loved objects and photos around the home. Let in natural light during the day. Slow down and try to relax if you think your own worries may be causing concern.
- Try focusing on an object or activity. Distract the person with a snack, beverage, or activity. You could watch a favorite TV show, listen to music, go for a walk, read a book, or do a household chore, such as folding laundry, together.
- Protect yourself and others if needed. Hide or lock up car keys and items that could be used in a harmful way, such as guns and kitchen knives. If your loved one becomes aggressive, stay at a safe distance until the behavior stops. Talk to a doctor if aggressive behaviors worsen and consider medications that may help. In an emergency, call 911 and explain that your loved one has dementia.

Sundowning: Avoiding Late-Day Confusion

When restlessness, agitation, irritability, and confusion happen as daylight begins to fade, it's known as

sundowning. Being overly tired can increase late-afternoon and early-evening restlessness. Try taking these steps with the person living with dementia to help prevent sundowning:

- Stick to a schedule.
- Arrange a time to go outside or sit by a window to get sunlight each day.
- Aim to be physically active each day, but don't plan too many activities.
- Avoid alcoholic drinks and beverages with caffeine, such as coffee or cola, late in the day.
- Discourage long naps and dozing late in the day.

You may also be interested in

- Reading more about [managing behavior changes in Alzheimer's](#)
- Finding [resources for help with Alzheimer's caregiving](#)
- Exploring [ways to take care of yourself](#) as a caregiver

For more information

NIA Alzheimer's and related Dementias Education and Referral (ADEAR) Center
800-438-4380
adear@nia.nih.gov
www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers

The NIA ADEAR Center offers information and free print publications about Alzheimer's and related dementias for families, caregivers, and health professionals. ADEAR Center staff answer telephone, email, and written requests and make referrals to local and national resources.

Alzheimers.gov

www.alzheimers.gov

Explore the Alzheimers.gov website for information and resources on Alzheimer's and related dementias from across the federal government.

Eldercare Locator

800-677-1116

eldercarelocator@USAging.org

<https://eldercare.acl.gov>

Alzheimer's Association

800-272-3900

866-403-3073 (TTY)

info@alz.org

www.alz.org

Alzheimer's Foundation of America

866-232-8484

info@alzfdn.org

<https://alzfdn.org>

Family Caregiver Alliance

800-445-8106

info@caregiver.org

www.caregiver.org

National Respite Locator Service

www.archrespite.org/respitelocator

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