

Navigating Sundowning

ADDITIONAL TIPS

- **Encourage daytime activity.** Gentle movement, time outside, and simple activities during the day can help reduce restlessness later on and improve nighttime sleep.
- **Watch for health changes.** Sudden or worsening sundowning may be linked to medication side effects, infections, pain, poor sleep, or vision or hearing changes. Always share new behaviors with a healthcare provider.
- **Build in support for yourself.** Evenings can be emotionally draining. Pace your energy during the day and remind yourself that these behaviors are caused by the disease—not by choice or feelings toward you.

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Sundowning refers to a group of behaviors that tend to occur in the late afternoon or evening in people living with dementia. These behaviors may include increased confusion or disorientation, anxiety, irritability, restlessness, or pacing. While it can be exhausting, there are ways to make evenings calmer and more manageable.

1

Create a predictable evening routine.

A consistent routine helps the brain feel safe. Try serving dinner around the same time each night, following the same steps before bed, and sticking to calm, simple activities in the evening.

2

Adjust lighting early.

As daylight fades, shadows and dim rooms can increase confusion and anxiety. Turning on lights before the sun starts to set, using night-lights in hallways and bathrooms, and closing curtains to reduce glare or confusing reflections can all help.

3

Ensure basic needs are met ahead of time.

Restlessness in the evening may be caused by hunger, thirst or discomfort. Offering a light snack or drink in the late afternoon, encouraging a bathroom break before evening confusion sets in, and avoiding caffeine or sugary foods later in the day can make a big difference.

4

Use reassurance instead of reasoning.

Instead of correcting or arguing, gentle reassurance is often more effective. Simple, comforting phrases like “You’re safe,” “I’m right here with you,” or “Everything is okay” can help calm fears.

5

Track patterns, triggers, and health factors.

Keep notes about when sundowning starts, what happened earlier in the day, and what helps or makes things worse. Patterns can guide better routines and prevent triggers.