

# Behavioural and Psychological Symptoms of Dementia (Sundowning)

## What is Sundowning?

People with dementia may experience behavioural changes which occur in the last afternoon and lasting into the night. For example, they may become more disoriented, restless, pace around the house, exhibit agitation and experience confusion.



## What Are Some Possible Causes of Sundowning?

Understanding the causes can be helpful in managing these behaviours:

- Side effects of medications.
- Poor sleep cycle and quality.
- Mental and/or physical exhaustion from a full day.
- Low lighting in the late afternoon can increase shadows, potentially leading persons with dementia to become confused by their surroundings and contributing to their agitation.

## What Can I Do as a Caregiver?

### Managing individuals with dementia on a personal level:

- **Be patient and validate their feelings**

Acknowledge their emotions and provide reassurance. In the work of providing reassurance, caregiver can render comforting touch (e.g., holding their hand, hugging) to manage sundowning behaviours.

- **Establish a regular sleep schedule with a brief afternoon nap**

Encourage a regular sleep schedule and limit daytime naps to prevent excessive wakefulness at night.

However, a brief afternoon nap of up to 30 minutes can sometimes help reduce fatigue, potentially mitigating sundowning.

- **Establish a consistent routine**

Sticking to a consistent and regular daily schedule can provide a sense of security and stability for individuals with dementia.

- **Engage in meaningful activities**

Engage the individuals with mild (i.e. an evening walk, pacing with no physical restraints at a safe place) to moderate level of activities may help to reduce restlessness and to improve their sleep at night.



## Managing individuals with dementia by utilising environmental cues:

- **Manage daytime and evening lighting**

Ensure adequate lighting during the day if possible, spending some time outside in the sunlight to regulate the circadian rhythm.

Ensure the room is well-lit in the evening to avoid shadows, which can confuse the individual and trigger sundowning.

- **Create a calming environment**

Create a peaceful and comfortable space for your loved one. Use soothing colours, reduce clutter, and play calming music if it helps.

- **Limit external stimuli**

Reduce noise and distractions in the environment, especially during the evening.



Remember that each person with dementia is unique, and what works for one individual may not work for another. It's essential to observe and adapt your approach based on your loved one's needs and preferences.

Consulting with doctors, healthcare professionals, including specialists in dementia care service, can also provide valuable insights and support for you and your loved ones.

## Available Resources for Caregivers:

### Dementia Singapore

A social service agency for dementia care, caregiver support, training and consultancy.



<https://dementia.org.sg>

Dementia Helpline:  
6377 0700

### CARA SG

Mobile app to access personalised support for persons living with dementia and caregivers.



<https://cara.sg>

Contributed by Nursing and Psychology, Allied Health Services

This brochure is produced for educational purposes and should not be used as a substitute for medical diagnosis or treatment. Please seek the advice of a qualified healthcare provider before starting any treatment or if you have any questions related to your health or medical condition.

Information shared is accurate as of June 2024 and subject to revision without prior notice.



Scan QR code to download e-brochure