



Sundowning Syndrome can be Challenging

Part of the challenge of taking care of a loved one with Alzheimer's disease or dementia is facing symptoms of "Sundowners," which can affect up to 1 in 5 people. Sundowner's symptoms tend to begin in the middle stages of Alzheimer's, and can fade with the progression of the disease.

Although doctors aren't sure why this happens, they do believe that dementia affects your 'body clock,' as the part of your brain signaling whether you're awake or asleep begins to lose function. As it gets later in the day, and it become darker, symptoms worsen.

These include: escape behaviors, wandering, mood swings, hallucinations, disorientation, paranoia, confusion, aggression and even violence.

Symptoms are also likely to be more prominent when your loved one is feeling tired, hungry, thirsty, in pain, depressed, anxious, or bored. This condition may be stressful for caregivers, but there are ways to help alleviate the symptoms.

Ways to reduce Sundowning Symptoms:

<p>1. Early Schedule- Schedule outings, including appointments early in the day, especially if you notice the symptoms worsening as the day progresses. This is usually when sundowners are feeling their best.</p>
<p>2. Regulation of sleep- Routine is key with Sundowner's. Waking up and going to sleep around the same time each day is important, as is keeping naps to a minimum. If your loved one is tired by the end of the day, they are more likely to sleep through the night. Also try to have them eat around the same time each day.</p>
<p>3. There will be light! And, ambiance- Eliminating shadows from the setting sun can help ease your loved one's anxiety. This means closing the blinds and turning on the lights, and opening up the blinds in the morning to let natural light in.</p>
<p>4. Zen out- Plan calm activities in the afternoon and evenings, like reading, going on a walk, or playing relaxing music. Low-energy activities will help in winding down for the day. In addition, attempt to eliminate sensory stimulation such as clutter. Calming essential oils can also help.</p>
<p>5. Avoid stimulants- Stimulants can further agitate your loved one. This includes nicotine, alcohol, coffee, sugar, late night exercise or highly stimulating entertainment. If coffee is a must, then make sure it's only in the morning - or try to switch to decaf. Positive stimulants such as exercise, visiting the theatre and gardening are helpful, but it's encouraged that these activities are complete in the morning.</p>
<p>6. Responding instead of reacting- While interacting with someone who has Sundowner's you may experience quite a lot of stress at times. Reacting with anger does not help the situation. Often your loved one is reacting to your own stressful energy. Regardless of their actions, attempt to keep your voice and body language calm. Reassure them that everyone is ok, and avoid arguing. Let them walk around, or pace, if need be, just be aware if they try to escape.</p>
<p>7. Technology and tools- There are devices on the market that can help. These include but are not limited to: door sensors, baby monitors, stair gates,</p>

wanderguard bracelets, night lights, door or window locks, and motion detectors. Also, make sure anything dangerous is out of reach.

8. Avoid triggers- Observe when your loved one is triggered. Does this happen when it's too crowded at home? Is it a certain food? A certain TV channel? Keep notes, try to identify consistent triggers, then try to reduce them.

9. Medication- If nothing seems to be helping, then you may want to consider some of the medications available on the market for Sundowner's. Certain herbs and/or supplements may also help. So can other therapeutic modalities such as acupuncture.

10. Take care of yourself- Sometimes sundowning is more difficult on the caregiver than the patient due to the stress, anxiety and lack of sleep it may cause. Know that you're not alone, and there are resources out there to help you. Ask family members or friends if they can help. Join a support group, take breaks, check in with the doctor and consider a Home Health care service to help.