Tips to help prevent Sun Downing

Maintain a routine:

Try to help them build and stick to a regular routine every day. For example, if they get up, bathe, eat, and go to bed at the same time every day, it will help them be calmer and minimize opportunities for confusion.

Plan relaxing afternoon activities:

Try to schedule any doctors' appointments, trips, or other stimulating activities for the mornings.

In afternoons and evenings try to avoid noisy groups and loud noises if possible, as well as doing any chores that might be overwhelming for them. If they have mid-stage or advanced dementia, watching television or reading a book might be too difficult for them in the evening consider playing soft music to create a calm and quiet environment. Some people also enjoy looking at photographs, or snuggle with a beloved pet.

Encourage trips outside while it is light:

Consider going for a walk in the park together earlier in the day. If this is not possible, perhaps having your loved one sitting near a window in the day light, or in the garden weather permitting (ensuring they are not too hot or cold!). This may help reduce their restlessness, give them natural sunlight exposure and fresh air, and might improve their sleep quality.

Make sure that they have been eating and drinking:

Your loved one may have an unmet need that they cannot communicate. Ensuring that they are well fed, watered, and toileted may help. Opt for a light, easily digestible dinner to avoid discomfort during the night. Foods high in sugar may also contribute to restlessness and should be avoided in the evening. A balanced diet and mindful eating can enhance overall well-being and sleep quality.

Improve lighting in the home:

Uneven indoor lighting and reflective surfaces can sometimes cause confusion by creating disturbing shadows or mirrors. Close the curtains or blinds once it starts to get dark and cover the television with a dust cover or blanket, if it's not being used. Make sure rooms are well-lit and the person with dementia can clearly see what they need to.

Avoid stimulants including prescribed medication:

Limit caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol consumption to the earlier part of the day.

Some prescribed medications may come with side effects that trigger sun downing, especially if they're taken in the late afternoon or evening. If you are noticing that your loved one is experiencing sun downing regularly, check with their doctor and ask them when it's best to take their medications to reduce possible triggers.

Consider having a nap/stopping naps:

Some people find that avoiding naps in the day is a good idea, in order to keep close to the body's natural circadian rhythm. Other people find that a short afternoon nap helps to alleviate agitated behaviour due to tiredness in the evening. Whether or not napping is effective will depend on how well the person you care for is able to sleep through the night.

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Communication:

If someone is irritable, angry, or displaying other symptoms, try to be patient and avoid displaying frustration. Methods to promote good communication with someone with dementia include:

Deep breathing—inhale and exhale slowly to ease frustration

Explaining what you're doing before touching the person with dementia, as when bathing or dressing them

Listening to the person experiencing symptoms; don't try to argue or reason with them

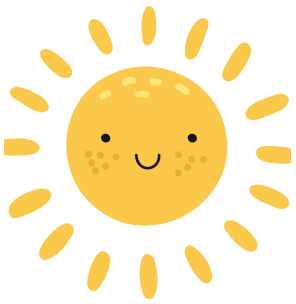
Providing reassurance that you're there to help and provide support

Trying to use humour

Using a calm voice, speaking slowly and clearly

Using touch, such as hugs or stroking hair, instead of speaking

Validating their feelings, showing empathy when they feel upset



Environment

You can support people with dementia by creating a comfortable home environment. For example,

create a space with natural light during the day and soothing but sufficient light in the evenings.

Decorate the home with cherished objects, like pictures, photographs, or other keepsakes.

Reduce household clutter and work to prevent excessive noise.

Activities

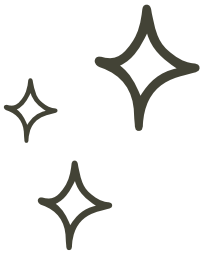
Certain activities or objects can help someone with dementia as they experience symptoms, changing their focus. For example you could try

Doing simple tasks together, such as folding laundry.

Playing music, singing, or dancing.

Reading them a book that they enjoy.

Watching a TV show or movie that they enjoy.



Safety

As a caregiver for someone with dementia and sun downing, it's essential to consider safety, which can involve:

Hiding or locking away any knives, keys, or other objects that could be weapons.

Keeping yourself at a safe distance when the person with dementia is becoming aggressive.

Seeking medical help if they're hallucinating or experiencing delusions.

Track what helps and what doesn't:

Sometimes with Dementia it is like being a detective.

Each person has different triggers for sun downing. To help identify your loved one's triggers, use a journal or smartphone app to track their daily activities, environments, and behaviours. Look for patterns to learn which activities or environments seem to make their symptoms worse or easier to manage.

Once you know their triggers, it will be easier to avoid situations that promote agitation and confusion.