

MEMORY LOSS AND SUNDOWNING

Living with memory loss can affect a person's ability to sleep adequately. They might experience increased confusion, anxiety and agitation beginning in late afternoon and continuing throughout the night; this is referred to as sundowning.

What factors might contribute to sleep issues and sundowning?

- Exhaustion from a day trying to keep up with an unfamiliar or a confusing environment.
- Reduced lighting can increase shadows causing confusion.
- Confusion from inability to separate dreams from reality when asleep.
- Need for less sleep, which can be common with older adults.
- Nonverbal behaviors of others can contribute to stress levels of a person living with memory loss.
- Dysregulation of one's internal body clock can cause confusion between day and night.

What can be done to help someone manage sleep issues and sundowning?

- Schedule appointments, trips and bathing in the morning or early afternoon.
- Encourage a regular routine for sleep/wake cycles and meals.
- When able, try walks or enjoy time outside in the sunlight.
- Monitor and document what happens before sundowning and identify possible triggers.
- Try and reduce stimulation such as TV, loud music, chores, etc., in the evening hours as this can increase confusion.
- Keep the environment well lit, especially in the evening, which can help reduce confusion.
- Try to identify soothing activities for the person, such as looking at photographs, watching favorite movies or listening to calming music.
- Ask one question at a time and use yes or no questions.
- Try offering a larger meal at lunch and keeping the evening meal light

**If you need more information or have questions,
please contact our Clinical Social Worker, Danielle Hellios, MSW, LCSW at 847.882.6604.**