

Australian version

iSupport For Dementia

Training and support manual
for carers of people with dementia



Unit 4. Difficulty sleeping

Why is this unit important?

People with dementia may be confused between night and day, making sleeping during the night difficult. People with dementia may have affected sleep habits due to other medical conditions. Disturbed sleep habits can impact the carer's sleep as well.

How will this unit help me?

This learning unit will provide examples and practices to promote good sleep.

What will I learn?

- How to help someone with dementia who has difficulties falling asleep.
- How to help someone with dementia who wakes up in the middle of the night.
- What may cause sleeping difficulties and how to change this.

Difficulty with sleeping: What happens?

Difficulty with sleeping can be a problem for people with dementia and their families. People with dementia can have difficulty falling asleep, wake up in the middle of the night, or wake up too early in the morning. People who provide care can have their sleep disrupted as a result which can make it harder to provide care.

If the person you care for wakes up at night, the person may start to wander.

You can now practice how to help promote good sleep for the person.



Activity **What is the main problem?**

What is the main problem that the person you care for has with regard to sleeping? *Click all that apply.*

- Difficulty falling asleep
- Waking up in the middle of the night or early morning
- Combination of the above
- Sleeps through the day
- Other (please specify):

Difficulty falling asleep

Rosie has dementia. She lives with her family and sleeps near her granddaughter, Grace. Usually, the family has dinner around 6pm. The family is used to doing some activities together afterwards. Rosie does not always like these activities, so the family often want her to go to bed by 8pm. Grace notices that Rosie has trouble falling asleep. Rosie continues to open and shut her dresser drawers noisily during the evening. When her granddaughter goes to bed, the noise keeps her awake.

Check your understanding **Understanding sleeping difficulties.**

Think of the three boxes. Write down what you think goes in each box:

What comes before the behaviour?

What is the changed behaviour?

What should Grace's response be?

Check your understanding**Grace's response**

Here are some responses,

click all that you think may be appropriate to help Rosie falling asleep:

- Give her a pill to sleep.
- Go for a walk with Rosie and add more physical activity during the day.
- Try to ensure Rosie does not drink coffee or too much fluid a few hours before going to bed.
- Make lunch the bigger meal of the day.
- Make sure the bedroom is a comfortable temperature and provide security objects, such as nightlights, if needed.
- Limit daytime naps to 15 to 30 minutes.
- Play soothing music before bedtime to help Rosie sleep.
- Create a bedtime routine, like lowering the lights, washing face and teeth, and changing into pyjamas.
- Keep in mind that some people may require less sleep. Generally, 6 to 8 hours sleep from 8pm means night waking between 2 to 4 am.
- Take the dresser away.

Check your understanding

*Grace's response*

- ✗ **Give her a pill to sleep.**
This is not a good idea. It can make someone with dementia even more confused or agitated and sleeping pills may become addictive.
- ✓ **Go for a walk with Rosie and add more physical activity during the day.**
This is a good idea! Physical exercise during the day may help sleep at night.
- ✓ **Try to ensure Rosie does not drink coffee or too much fluid a few hours before going to bed.**
This is a good response. Coffee, tea, or too much liquid can keep people awake and cause frequent urination.
- ✓ **Make lunch the bigger meal of the day.**
This is helpful. A light dinner makes it easier to sleep.
- ✓ **Make sure the bedroom is a comfortable temperature and provide security objects, such as nightlights, if needed.**
This is helpful as ensures the environment meets Rosie's needs to make it easier to sleep.
- ✓ **Limit daytime naps to 15 to 30 minutes.**
This might be a good idea. It addresses the need for sleep during the day, but not so long that it will prevent Rosie from falling asleep later on.
- ✓ **Play soothing music before bedtime to help Rosie sleep.**
This is a good idea. Too much activity before bed can cause a person to be stimulated and stay awake. Find relaxing activities before bed such as music or reading to Rosie.
- ✓ **Create a bedtime routine, like lowering the lights, washing face and teeth, and changing into pajamas.**
This is a good response because a routine will relax the person with dementia.
- ✓ **Keep in mind that some people may require less sleep. Generally, 6 to 8 hours sleep from 8pm means night waking between 2 to 4 am.**
Stick to normal sleeping time as much as possible.
- ✗ **Take the dresser away.**
This is not a good response as it does not address Rosie's need or the cause of the behaviour.

Waking up in the middle of the night

It is 3 am in the morning and Annie wakes up and begins to walk around the house. Her daughter, Grace, is sleeping. Annie paces throughout the house and then goes to Grace and wakes her up. Annie asks: 'Where are we? I want to go home.'

Grace is upset because she has a long day at work tomorrow. Grace says: 'Mum, you need to go back to bed, it is 3 am.' Annie says: 'I am not sleepy.' Grace yells: 'I can't take this anymore.'

How do you think Grace should handle this situation with her mother?

Person-centred care

Imagine being in the shoes of the person living with dementia and how would you like to be treated.

Check your understanding

Grace's response. If Grace wants to keep Annie from walking at 3 am, what can she do?

Which of the following responses do you think are appropriate? Select all that apply and drop them in the box.

- Tell Annie how foolish it is to be awake at 3 am.
- Try to understand what will help Annie sleep. Some people prefer to keep the room dark with no TV or as little noise as possible and some people prefer a night light, soft music or a television playing.
- Give Annie a favourite object to relax (blanket or stuffed animal, etc.).
- Schedule an appointment with the doctor to find out if there is a medical reason for her trouble sleeping (urinary tract infection, pain, medications).
- Develop an activity schedule to keep Annie awake and busy during the day.
- Encourage physical exercise during the day (e.g., walking, stretching).
- Tell Annie that you won't take care of her anymore if you are continuously woken up at night.
- Ask if she has to go to the bathroom or is hungry or thirsty. If the answer is 'yes', then just assist her to meet these needs.
- Physically take hold of her and put her back in bed.
- Ask for help from a family member, friend or a paid professional.

Check your understanding**Grace's response**

- ✗ **Tell Annie how foolish it is to be awake at 3 am.**
This answer is not good. Annie cannot help her confusion and this will not help Annie to fall asleep again. It may cause her to feel embarrassed or agitated preventing sleep.
- ✓ **Try to understand what will help Annie sleep. Some people prefer to keep the room dark with no TV or as little noise as possible and some people prefer a night light, soft music or a television playing.**
This answer is a good one. Each person is different and you may need to try several possible solutions before finding one that works.
- ✓ **Give Annie a favourite object to relax (blanket or stuffed animal, etc.).**
This response is a good one. It may help Annie feel relaxed and secure.
- ✓ **Schedule an appointment with the doctor to find out if there is a medical reason for her trouble sleeping (urinary tract infection, pain, medications).**
While it is not necessary to seek medical attention every time a person with dementia can't sleep, seeking advice if it happens all the time or upsets the person with dementia or you.

Check your understanding (Continued)

*Grace's response*

- ✓ **Develop an activity schedule to keep Annie awake and busy during the day.**
This is a good idea. It may improve sleep at night.
- ✓ **Encourage physical exercise during the day (e.g. walking, stretching).**
This may be helpful to improve sleep at night.
- ✗ **Tell Annie that you won't take care of her anymore if you are continuously woken up at night.**
This is not a good response. Keep in mind that dementia is a disease and someone with dementia will be dependent on the care others provide.
- ✓ **Ask if she has to go to the bathroom or is hungry or thirsty. If the answer is 'yes', then just assist her to meet these needs.**
This is helpful. Such a break might help the person to get to sleep again.
- ✗ **Physically take hold of her and put her back in bed.**
Never do this. Although it may be very difficult to deal with sleeping problems, respect the dignity of someone with dementia. Moreover, Annie may get agitated or angry. It definitely will not solve sleeping problems.
- ✓ **Ask for help from a family member, friend or a paid professional.**
This might be helpful. Eventually, the lack of sleep can affect any family's ability to care. Someone else can assist by giving the family member a night or a weekend off.

Check your understanding**Your response****You've identified several ways to improve sleep.**

Which of the previous responses would you choose in case of sleeping problems of the person you care for? More responses may apply:

- Remind yourself to stay calm and focus on getting the person with dementia to sleep. This way, you will use your energy to solve the sleeping problem, rather than reacting emotionally.
- Gently remind the person that it is dark outside, and it is time to sleep. If needed, try to provide some relaxation, such as soothing music.
- Read aloud to the person you care for. Choose something that you know has a calming effect, perhaps a calming poem or story. Sing a song or chant together. Another option is to meditate for 15 minutes together.



- Provide the person with dementia comfort. Give a stuffed animal and hug or hold the person until he/she falls asleep.
- Consider using a sleep diary to see if you notice any trends or habits that could be affecting sleep patterns. For example, is the person drinking too much coffee at night?
- Try to maintain the person's lifelong sleeping pattern. For example, if the person used to get up early in the morning, see if maintaining this habit helps.

Check your understanding**Your response**

- ✓ Remind yourself to stay calm and focus on getting the person with dementia to sleep. This way, you will use your energy to solve the sleeping problem, rather than reacting emotionally.
Correct!
- ✓ Gently remind the person that it is dark outside, and it is time to sleep. If needed, try to provide some relaxation, such as soothing music.
Great idea!
- ✓ Read aloud to the person you care for. Choose something that you know has a calming effect, perhaps a calming poem or story. Sing a song or chant together. Another option is to meditate for 15 minutes together.
Good response!
- ✓ Provide the person with dementia comfort. Give a stuffed animal and hug or hold the person until he/she falls asleep.
Great idea!
- ✓ Consider using a sleep diary to see if you notice any trends or habits that could be affecting sleep patterns. For example, is the person drinking too much coffee at night?.
Good response!
- ✓ Try to maintain the person's lifelong sleeping pattern. For example, if the person used to get up early in the morning, see if maintaining this habit helps.
Great idea!

Let's review what you have learned

- Difficult sleep patterns are common in people with dementia.
- Sleeping problems can be very stressful to deal with.
- In case of difficulty sleeping, try to increase the comfort of the person you care for.
- Try to identify circumstances that may increase sleeping difficulties and change or address them.
- When one approach doesn't work, try another one.
- Realise there will be good and bad days.
- Remind yourself that sleeping difficulties are part of the disease.
- Take a deep breath and think about the best ways to respond that will be least distressing for you and the person you care for in case of sleeping problems.
- Ask for help. It is hard to provide good care on limited sleep.

Difficulty sleeping may be related to depression.

If **the person you care for** has difficulty sleeping, you might want to continue with the part on depression and anxiety.

Tip

Useful Resources

- **Dementia Australia** www.dementia.org.au
The National Dementia Helpline is a free confidential phone and email information and support service. The Helpline number is 1800 100 500 and operates from 9.00am to 5.00pm Monday to Friday excluding public holidays. A message service is available so if you call outside operating hours, you will get a call to you back the next working day.
- **Dementia Support Australia** www.dementia.com.au/
Dementia Support Australia (DSA) is an industry partnership led by HammondCare. Sleep Health 24 Hour Helpline is available on 1800 699 799.

RELATED LEARNING UNITS

- Module 3 Unit 2 Making time for pleasant activities
- Module 4 Unit 4 Personal care
- Module 5 Unit 5 Delusions and hallucinations

You finished this learning unit, well done!

Would you like to try the following relaxation exercise?

Breathing

Focusing on your breathing is relaxing. By doing a breathing exercise you could reduce tension.

Caution: if you experience difficulty breathing, this exercise might not be the best option for you.

This is how you do it:

- When sitting down: Sit up straight in your chair with your back against the back of your chair.
- When standing: Stand up straight.
- Put both of your feet flat on the surface.
- Focus on your breathing.
- Keep breathing like you are used to. Try to feel how you breathe.
- Put your hand on your stomach to feel how you inhale and exhale.
- Exhale from your mouth and pull in your stomach as much as possible.
- Follow your breathing in this manner a couple of breaths and then stop with the exercise.





You finished this unit, well done!