

Sundowning refers to behavioural difficulties that increase toward the end of the day, with symptoms including restlessness, agitation, suspicious behaviour, disorientation, hallucinations, and less cooperation, often becoming worse after a move or change in routine.

Risk Factors

The causes are often unknown; however, risk factors may include:

- Emotional and physical fatigue
- Disturbed night-time sleep
- Insufficient hydration or food intake
- Loneliness, lack of company or stimulation
- Difficulty or inability to express needs.
- Inability to understand what is happening in the environment.

Tips

- *Identify:* the reasons for the behaviour', check what's going on inside and outside the person. Is the person in pain, hungry, thirsty, wet, or in an uncomfortable position? Are light levels creating shadow or is it becoming dark? Ensure that the person is wearing their hearing aids and glasses, (and that they are clean) and the environment is well lit, and noise levels are suitable.
- Tiredness can be a factor in Sundowning. Don't ask the person to do complicated things at the end of the day and try to get the balance of stimulation right: not too much, not too little. Consider whether the person may benefit by a short nap (not more than half an hour, or you'll disrupt night-time sleep).
- Plan quiet, relaxing activities for the afternoon, creating a calm mood, ensuring regular routines for waking and sleeping and periods of exercise as well as regular mealtimes.
- Spending time outdoors in sunlight may help to reset body rhythms.
- Spending time reading or looking at family photos, as well as a hand massage often calms, and doing something that are fun, such as painting nails, brushing hair or helping prepare the evening meal may also be beneficial.
- Sometimes a person may respond to having a 'job', such as setting the table or helping prepare the meal.
- Try to keep the person active during the morning.
- Organise a daily short walk and develop activities that will help prevent boredom.
- Offer an early afternoon nap.
- Try to schedule showering in the morning or early afternoon.
- If the person wanders and paces about, provide an environment where the person can do so safely, or take them for a walk.
- Avoid caffeine after 4–4.30pm and develop a nighttime routine.
- Close curtains and eliminate light but provide adequate lighting.
- Cut down on background noise.

- Some people become frightened of silence—try playing a radio or soft music.
- Offer a warm, milky drink—but be mindful hot chocolate often contains caffeine.
- *Evening Activities* - Provide activities that involve listening to favourite tunes, sensory stimulation (a box filled with interesting objects of different colours, shapes, and textures to touch and hold), or watching videos of family members.

Evening communication

- Approach from the front and call the person by name.
- Ensure you are at eye level and gain their attention before communicating.
- Speak slowly and in a gentle tone of voice, using short sentences of simple words.
- Don't talk to them like a baby.
- Show understanding with their difficulties, rather than correcting or criticizing them.
- Point at objects/people and use drawings or pictures to help them understand what you are saying, or what you would like done.
- Patience, Patience, and more patience.

Case Study: Each afternoon at about 4.30pm Mrs ABC becomes increasingly agitated and determined to go and get her children from school as well as pick up a little shopping on the way home. She says she must be home in time to start preparing the evening meal.

What may assist during this period of increased restlessness?

- **Validate**—Being warm and friendly acknowledge how important it is to collect the children from school.
- **Distract**—Explain that it's not quite time to get the children yet and use the time to sit with her and talk about them, describing a fun time.
- **Reassure**—If Mrs ABC is frantic that the children might start walking home alone, reassure her that all is well.
- **Plan**—Set up another way to engage Mrs ABC in alternate activities e.g. starting the meal preparations or folding the serviettes. Closing the curtains and putting on a favourite program or playing some music might be of help.