



Caregiver's Answers, Topics, and Helpful Information

As we endeavor to continually assist caregivers in their search for pertinent information regarding eldercare, our Information and Referral Specialists address the most frequently asked questions via **Caregiver's Answers, Topics and Helpful Information (CATHI)**. Caregivers are also invited to e-mail individual questions to caregiver2@senior-reosources-guilford.org and an Information and Referral Specialist will reply.

Dear CATHI, what is Sundowning?

The term "sundowning" refers to when adults with Alzheimer's or dementia become agitated, confused, and disoriented in the late afternoon and evening hours – when the sun is going down. These behaviors can continue into the night, making it difficult for the loved one to stay in bed and fall asleep. This in turn can make it difficult for caregivers to get enough rest as well. Sundowning is not well understood, but here are some useful tips to help lessen its effects.

Identify triggers: It's important to identify potential culprits for your loved one's mood. Often our loved ones may just be uncomfortable. Offering a blanket incase they're cold or turning on a lamp incase they are nervous in the dark, can make all the difference. Check too to see if they're hungry or thirsty by offering a snack or a glass of water. Sometimes our loved ones may also be tired earlier in the day, causing them to feel agitated and confused. Allow them to take time to rest but keep naps short and not too late in the day!

Start a routine: Starting a routine can be tough, but routine can help comfort your loved one, helping them cope more effectively. Do your best to establish regular mealtimes and times to take medication. It is also important to stick to a regular bedtime, wake up time, and even rest time.

Wind down in the evening: Reducing noise, clutter, and the number of people in the room can help your loved one relax. Offering something to read or playing soft music creates an environment that helps them calm down. Be sure to give your loved one plenty of personal space. Having a family member or friend call during this time may also help with relaxation.

Adjust the lighting: Controlling the lighting in the home can make a difference for your loved one. Sundowning may be caused by an upset in the “internal body clock”, causing a biological mix-up between day and night. To aid with this, turning on the lights and opening the curtains during the day, and turning down the lights and closing the curtains during the evening can help regulate this “internal body clock”.

Redirect your loved one: If your loved one is awake and upset, redirecting them to a repetitive task may help. Be sure to approach them in a calm manner and offer activities like folding laundry, sorting items by color, or doing the dishes. This can help shift your loved one’s state of mind.

Things to avoid: A few tips have also been identified to avoid, as these can make sundowning worse. Drinking caffeinated drinks like soda, coffee, and other drinks too late in the day can make it harder for your loved one to wind down. Alcoholic drinks too can add to confusion and anxiety. Over planning and over stimulating our loved ones can also make sundowning worse, causing our loved ones to become tired much earlier in the day. Do your best to avoid arguing and offer reassurance that everything is alright. Lastly, do not physically restrain your loved one.

When to see a doctor: If sundowning continues to be a problem, it might be time to see a doctor. Underlying medical conditions can mimic sundowning, such as urinary tract infections, restless leg syndrome, and sleep apnea. Medication may also be prescribed to assist with sleeping. Be sure to check with your loved one’s doctor about possible side effects, risks, and benefits of medication before deciding.

This article was adapted from “Sundowning” written by Trualta located at www.nc-caregiver.com/learning/sundowning, “Sleep Issues and Sundowning” by Alzheimer’s Association located at www.alz.org/help-support/caregiving/stages-behaviors/sleep-issues-sundowning, and “Tips for Coping with Sundowning” by the National Institute on Aging located at www.nia.nih.gov/health/tips-coping-sundowning.

Note: This is for informational purposes only.

For referrals to community organizations in Guilford County that assist older adults and caregivers, contact Senior Resources of Guilford’s SeniorLine at (336) 884-6981 in High Point, all other areas (336) 333-6981 or the Family Caregiver Specialist at (336) 373-4816 or (336) 883-3586 in High Point.



