

Sundowning

It is common for people with middle and later stage Alzheimer's to experience increased confusion, anxiety, agitation, pacing and disorientation beginning in the mid to later afternoon and continue into the night. These late-day increases in behavioral problems are often called sundowning. Sundowning can disrupt the body's sleep-wake cycle, causing more behavioral problems.

Factors that may cause sundowning

- Mental and physical exhaustion from a full day trying to keep up with an unfamiliar or confusing environment.
- Caregivers, who are exhausted by the events of the day, may give off nonverbal cues of frustration, which could lead to negative reactions in the person with Alzheimer's.
- Reduced lighting and increased shadows may cause persons with Alzheimer's to misinterpret what they see — subsequently, becoming more agitated.
- Boredom or lack of activity through the day.
- Plan more challenging activities (doctor appointments, trips, bathing, etc.) in the morning or early afternoon hours when the person is more alert.
- Make notes about what happens before sundowning events and try to identify triggers.
- Limit the amount of environmental distractions during the evening hours (TV, children arriving, doing chores, loud music, etc.). These distractions may add to the person's confusion.
- Have a large meal at lunch and keep the evening meal simple.
- Keep the home well lit in the evening. Adequate indoor lighting may reduce the person's confusion, close curtains.
- Add more structured activity, especially physical activity through the day as their health allows. Such resources as adult day programs can help.
- Take a walk outdoors if the weather permits — this may reduce restlessness.
- When behavioral interventions and environmental changes do not work, some people with Alzheimer's may need medication for their agitation during the late afternoon and evening hours. This should be discussed with their doctor.

Tips to manage sundowning

- Be mindful of your own mental and physical exhaustion. If you are feeling stressed by the late afternoon, the person may pick up on it and become agitated or confused. Try to get plenty of rest at night so you have more energy during the day.

How to Contact the Alzheimer's Association – Heart of America Chapter 1.800.272.3900 • alz.org/kansascity

Main Office
3846 W. 75th Street
Prairie Village, KS 66208

Northeast Kansas Regional Office
3625 SW 29th St.
Suite 102
Topeka, KS 66614

Northwest Missouri Regional Office
10th and Faraon
St. Joseph, MO 64501

Southeast Kansas Regional Office
2601 Gabriel
Parsons, KS 67357