

# Tips for Managing Agitation, Aggression, and Sundowning

People living with Alzheimer's disease or a related dementia may act restless or worried. They may even lash out verbally or physically. These changes in behavior are common and can be very difficult for caregivers and family members. Try the following tips to help manage these symptoms.



## Communication: Be patient and try not to show frustration.



- Speak calmly and be aware of your facial expressions and body language.
- Listen to the concerns of the person living with dementia. Avoid arguing or trying to reason.
- Offer reassurance that your family member or friend is safe, and you are there to help.
- Use other communication methods besides speaking, such as gentle touching.
- Explain what you are going to do before touching the person with dementia, or starting a new activity, such as when bathing or going to the doctor.
- Show that you understand your family member or friend is upset. For example, say, "You seem worried."
- Take deep breaths and count to 10 if you get upset.

## Activities: Try focusing on an object or activity.



- Enjoy a favorite caffeine-free snack or beverage.
- Watch a familiar TV show.
- Listen to music, sing, or dance.
- Go for a walk.
- Read something enjoyable.
- Do simple tasks, like folding laundry.

## Sundowning: Avoiding Late-Day Confusion

When restlessness, agitation, irritability, and confusion happen as daylight begins to fade, it's known as sundowning. Being overly tired can increase late-afternoon and early-evening restlessness. Try taking these steps with the person living with dementia to help prevent sundowning:

- Stick to a schedule.
- Arrange a time to go outside or sit by a window to get sunlight each day.
- Aim to be physically active each day, but don't plan too many activities.
- Avoid alcoholic drinks and beverages with caffeine, such as coffee or cola, late in the day.
- Discourage long naps and dozing late in the day.



## Environment: Create a comforting home setting.



- Try to keep a routine, such as bathing, dressing, and eating at the same times each day.
- Reduce noise, clutter, or the number of people in the room.
- Play soothing music.
- Keep well-loved objects and photographs around the home.
- Adjust lighting, letting in natural light during the day, if possible, and try softer room lighting in the evening.
- Slow down and try to relax if you think your own worries may be causing concern.

## Safety: Protect yourself and others if needed.



- Hide or lock up car keys and possible weapons, including kitchen knives and guns.
- If your loved one becomes aggressive, stay at a safe distance until the behavior stops.
- Talk with a doctor if problems such as hitting, biting, depression, or hallucinations appear to worsen. Medications may help treat some behavioral symptoms.
- Call 911 in an emergency and be sure to tell responders that your family member or friend has dementia.