

WHEN SLEEP BECOMES AN ISSUE: TIPS AND STRATEGIES

What can cause sleep disturbances?

- ✓ Medical problems such as depression, restless leg syndrome, and sleep apnea.
- ✓ Pain caused by medical problems such as arthritis.
- ✓ A urinary tract infection which can result in a frequent need to go to the bathroom.
- ✓ The brain damage caused by the dementia may affect the brain's "clock", which controls our sleep patterns. This may cause the person to confuse day and night.
- ✓ The person's environment. For example, a resident of a long term care home may be exposed to noise or light throughout the night, keeping them awake.
- ✓ Changes in the environment, such as moving to a new home, can cause disorientation and confusion, resulting in disrupted sleep.
- ✓ Confusion between reality, older memories and dreams. For example, the person may wake from a dream in the middle of the night and think that since it was daytime in their dream, it is also daytime when they wake up.
- ✓ Too little exposure to bright light in the daytime.
- ✓ Too much exposure to bright light at night.
- ✓ Medications used to treat the symptoms of dementia.
- ✓ Too little exercise or lying down too much.

Helpful tips:

- ✓ Make an appointment for the person with dementia to have a full medical assessment to rule out infections, treatable conditions, and to review medications.
- ✓ 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.
- ✓ Try to have a consistent bedtime routine.
- ✓ Wake up at the same time every day.
- ✓ Try to save any conversations that may be upsetting for the day time. If the person becomes upset before bedtime it may be harder for them to fall and stay asleep.
- ✓ Provide the person with activities throughout the day to keep them active and engaged. Consider asking others to help with this or enrolling the person in an adult day program.
- ✓ If possible, take the person outdoors in the morning and before sunset. Exposure to daylight is important for helping regulate the brain's clock.
- ✓ If the person enjoys napping, encourage them to nap before lunch time. Naps should either be 10-15min in length (a restorative nap), or 90 min (a complete sleep cycle).
- ✓ If the person with dementia uses continence aids (such as adult briefs) ensure they are appropriate for night time and fit comfortably.
- ✓ Consider reducing caffeine, alcohol and liquid intake before bedtime.
- ✓ Keep the night-time room temperature between 18-22° C.

- ✓ Noise level should be kept under 30 decibels. If noise is an issue, consider getting a white noise machine or have a fan running during the night.
- ✓ Consider getting a digital alarm clock that displays the time and whether it is day or night. Visit <http://www.alzheimer.ca/en/We-can-help/Resources/Shopping-for-assistive-products> for more information on assistive products.
- ✓ Keep the room dark during the night. If safety is an issue, consider getting motion activated night lights.
- ✓ If the person enjoys watching TV before bedtime, use a timer on the TV so that it doesn't stay on all night.
- ✓ If the person enjoys baths, give them a warm bath before bed to help them relax.
- ✓ If it is okay with the person, rub their hands, arms, feet or legs with lotion to help them relax.
- ✓ Try warming up the person's bed with a hot water bottle or with a magic bag so that the bed feels warm and comfortable when they get into it.
- ✓ Try the passive body warming technique to promote sleep. To learn more about this technique visit <http://cbotlabs.wix.com/sleep-dementia>
- ✓ Avoid large amounts of food before bed, especially sugary treats, as this will make it harder to fall asleep.
- ✓ If non-pharmacological methods don't work, you may want to ask your doctor about medication for sleep. Keep in mind that using sleep medication for people with cognitive impairments such as dementia comes with risks, including risk of falls, increased confusion and a decline in independence. Try to discontinue sleep medication once a more regular sleep pattern returns.

Useful Resources

- ✓ Connect with the staff at your local Alzheimer Society for more information and support. Visit our website at www.alzheimer.ca or call 1-800-616-8816.
- ✓ Consider having an occupational therapist come into the home to help you with changes to the environment. Visit www.find-an-ot.ca to find an occupational therapist near you.
- ✓ Learn more about sleep and aging from the Canadian Sleep Society (https://css-scs.ca/files/resources/insomnia-rounds/150-004_Eng.pdf)
- ✓ To learn more about preventing and managing sleep disturbances visit: http://www.dementiamanagementstrategy.com/Pages/ABC_of_behaviour_management/Management_strategies/Sleep_disturbance.aspx
- ✓ Learn more about sleep and dementia from brainXchange (<http://brainxchange.ca/Public/Events/Upcoming-Events/Sleep-Matters-When-Someone-has-Dementia.aspx>)

References:

Sleep Matters When Someone has Dementia (2016). Webinar by BrainXchange. Retrieved from <http://brainxchange.ca/Public/Events/Upcoming-Events/Sleep-Matters-When-Someone-has-Dementia.aspx>

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Alzheimer Society

Alzheimer Society of Canada
 20 Eglinton Avenue West, 16th Floor, Toronto, Ontario, M4R 1K8
 Tel: 416-488-8772 1-800-616-8816 Fax: 416-322-6656
 E-mail: info@alzheimer.ca Website: www.alzheimer.ca

Facebook : www.facebook.com/AlzheimerSociety Twitter : www.twitter.com/AlzSociety

