

Sundowning

Sundowning, also known as "late-day confusion," refers to a state of confusion and agitation that typically occurs in the late afternoon, evening, or night, often experienced by individuals with Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia. It is a challenging phenomenon that can significantly impact both the affected individuals and their caregivers.

by Andrea Pogue

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Case study

Case:

John, aged 78, has been living with dementia for five years and resides in a long-term care facility. His cognitive decline has been gradual but steady, and he usually recognizes family members and familiar staff. He enjoys music, walking in the garden, and participating in daily exercises with other residents. Recently, John has been exhibiting more frequent and intense sundowning episodes in the late afternoon and early evening. How can we create a calm environment for John and keep his sundowning as peaceful as possible? How can we help him communicate his feelings?

Symptoms of Sundowning

1 Agitation and Restlessness

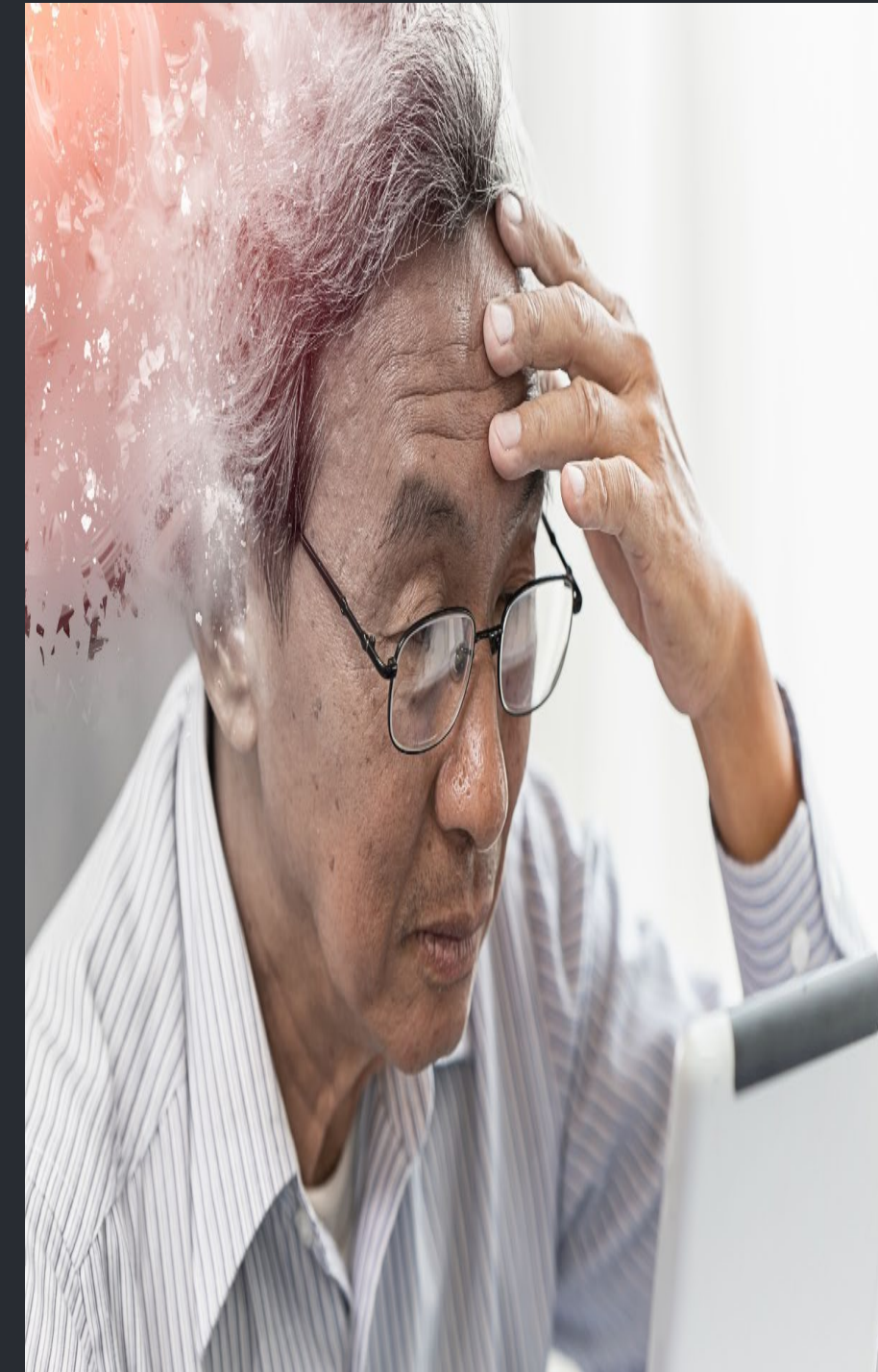
Increased agitation, restlessness, and pacing are common symptoms of sundowning. Individuals may display anxious behaviors and have difficulty staying still.

2 Confusion and Disorientation

Heightened confusion, disorientation, and difficulty following conversations or understanding surroundings are often observed during sundowning episodes.

3 Mood Swings

Drastic changes in mood, such as irritability, sadness, or emotional outbursts, can occur and may not be easily subsided during sundowning.



Causes of Sundowning

Disrupted Circadian Rhythms

Changes in the internal body clock and sleep-wake cycles can lead to increased confusion and behavioral disturbances during the evening hours.

Sensory Overload

Overstimulation from noise, lights, or activities can overwhelm the sensory system, contributing to agitation and restlessness.

Physical Exhaustion

Feelings of tiredness and fatigue towards the evening can exacerbate cognitive challenges and emotional instability.

Impact on Individuals with Dementia

Emotional Distress Physical Exhaustion Caregiver Stress

Sundowning can cause emotional distress, leading to feelings of fear, vulnerability, and frustration among individuals with dementia.

Episodes of sundowning can contribute to physical exhaustion, impacting sleep patterns and overall well-being.

Caregivers often experience increased stress and anxiety when managing the challenging behaviors associated with sundowning.



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Strategies for Managing Sundowni

Routine and Structure

Establishing a consistent daily routine can help regulate behaviors and reduce anxiety, providing a sense of predictability.

Environmental Modifications

Creating a calming environment with minimal stimulation, soft lighting, and familiar surroundings can lessen the impact of sundowning symptoms.

Engagement in Soothing Activities

Engaging in calming activities such as listening to music, gentle exercises, or relaxation techniques can alleviate restlessness and improve mood.



Creating a Calming Environment

Soft Lighting

Opt for soft, warm lighting in the evening to create a serene atmosphere and avoid harsh or bright lights.

Familiar Objects

Surround the individual with familiar objects, photographs, or comforting items to evoke feelings of security and comfort.

Encouraging Relaxation

Introduce calming scents, soothing music, and gentle activities to promote relaxation and reduce agitation during the evening hours.

Establishing a Routine



Consistent Schedule Wind-Down Activities Promoting Quality Sleep

Develop a consistent schedule for evening activities, incorporating relaxation and calming experiences to reduce the onset of sundowning.

Include wind-down activities such as gentle stretching, reading, or journaling to ease the transition into the evening hours.

Facilitate calming bedtime rituals to promote restful sleep and minimize disturbances during the night.

Strategies for Handling difficult situations with Sundowning

Validate Feelings

Engage in Soothing Activities

Distraction Techniques

Calm Demeanor

Consider Medications



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Seeking Professional Support

Specialized Care

Seeking care from healthcare professionals specialized in dementia can offer tailored support and guidance for managing sundowning.

Therapeutic Interventions

Professional interventions such as cognitive behavioral therapy or medication management can be beneficial in addressing sundowning symptoms.

Educational Resources

Accessing educational resources and caregiver support networks can provide valuable knowledge and coping strategies for managing sundowning effectively.



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