

# Understanding Sundowning in Those Living with Dementia

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**









# Case Study



# 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

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

## Physical Exhaustion

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

## Caregiver Stress

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



# Strategies for Managing Sundowning

1

## Routine and Structure

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

2

## Environmental Modifications

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

3

## 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

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

## Familiar Objects

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

## Encouraging Relaxation

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



# Establishing a Routine



## Consistent Schedule

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



## Wind-Down Activities

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



## Promoting Quality Sleep

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

# Strategies for Handling difficult situations with Sundowning

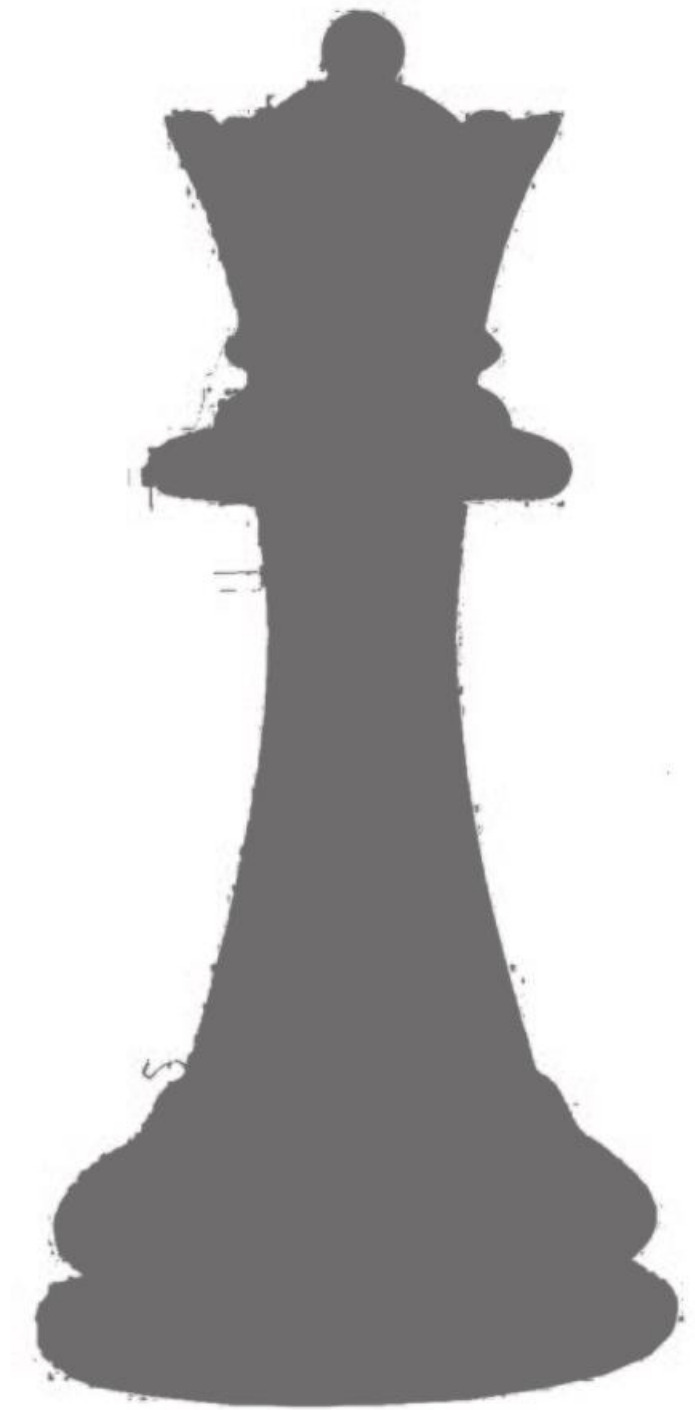
Validate Feelings

Engage in Soothing Activities

Distraction Techniques

Calm Demeanor

Consider Medications



STRATEGY

# 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.





# Andrea Golden-Pogue, RN, MSN

Oklahoma Dementia Care Network (OkDCN)

580-320-5812

[andrea-pogue@ouhsc.edu](mailto:andrea-pogue@ouhsc.edu)