

CATHI

**C**aregiver’s **A**nswers, **T**opics, and **H**elpful **I**nformation

In an endeavor to continually assist caregivers in their search for pertinent information regarding eldercare, our Information and Referral Specialists address topics most frequently asked questions via **C**aregiver’s **A**nswers, **T**opics, and **H**elpful **I**nformation (**CATHI**). Additionally, caregivers are invited to e-mail individual questions **caregiver2@senior-resources-guilford.org** and an Information and Referral Specialist will reply.

Dear CATHI,

**Question: What** is Sundowning?

**Answer:** The term “sundowning” refers to when adults with Alzheimer’s or some other type of dementia become agitated, confused, and disoriented in the late afternoon and evening hours when the sun is going down. These behaviors can continue into the night, making it difficult for them to stay in bed and fall asleep. In turn this can make it difficult for the caregiver to get enough rest as well. Sundowning isn’t understood very well, but here are some useful tips to help lessen its effects.

**Identify Triggers:** Its important to identify potential culprits based on your loved one’s mood. Often our loved ones may just be uncomfortable. Offering a blanket in case they’re cold or turning on a lamp in case they are afraid of the dark can make all the difference. Check to see if they are hungry or thirsty by offering a snack or a glass of water. Sometimes our loved ones may simply be tired earlier in the day, causing them to feel agitated or confused. Allow them time to rest but keep naps short and not too late in the day.

**Start a routine:** Starting a routine can be tough, but a routine can help comfort your loved one, helping them to cope more effectively. Do your best to establish regular mealtimes, medication times, naptimes and bedtimes. The more routine oriented their day is the more at ease they should be.

**Wind down in the evening:** Reducing noise, clutter, and the number of people in the room can help your loved one relax. Offering something to read or playing soft music creates an environment that helps calm. Give plenty of personal space. Having a family member or friend call during this time can help with relaxation.

**Adjust the lighting:** Sundowning may be caused by an“upset of the internal clock”causing a biological mix-up between day and night. To aid with this, turn on the lights and open the curtains during the day, and turn down the lights and close the curtains during the evening, can help regulate the “internal clock.”

**Redirect your loved one:** If your loved one is awake and upset, redirecting them to a repetitive task may help. Be sure to approach them in a calm manner and offer activities like folding laundry, sorting items by color, or doing dishes. This can help shift your loved one’s focus.

**Things to avoid:** A few things have also been identified to avoid as these can make sundowning worse. Drinking caffeinated drinks like soda, coffee, and other drinks too late in the day can make it harder for your loved one to wind down. Alcoholic drinks can also add to confusion and anxiety and confusion. Be cautious not to over plan or overstimulate your loved one. This can also cause them to become tired much earlier in the day leading to issues with sundowning.

**When to see the doctor:** If sundowning continues to be a problem, it may be time to see a doctor. Underlying medical issues can mimic sundowning, such as urinary tract infections, restless leg syndrome, and sleep apnea. Medication may need to be prescribed to assist with sleeping. Be sure to check about possible risks, side effects, and benefits before deciding about using medications,

This article was taken from “Sundowning” written by Trualta, “Sleep Issues and Sundowning” by Alzheimer’s Assn., and “Tips for Coping with Sundowning” by National Institute on Aging.

Note: This is for informational purposes only.

For referrals to community organizations in Guilford County that assist older adults and caregivers, contact Senior Resources of Guilford’s SeniorLine at (336) 333-6981 in Greensboro and Guilford Co., in High Point/Jamestown (336) 884-6981 or the Caregiver Support Specialist, at (336) 373-4816 or (336) 883-3586 in High Point.

