Dementia and Sundowning

People with dementia may have certain behaviors that worsen at the end of the day and through the night. This is called sundowning. These behaviors may include being more confused, restless, agitated, disoriented and anxious.

Sundowning may be caused by:

- Increased tiredness at the end of the day
- Changes in the person’s body clock that cause confusion between day and night
- Lack of light and increased shadows
- Less need for sleep with age

Tips to help:

- Restrict sweets and caffeine later in the day.
- Plan more daytime activities. Physical exercise, such as walking, is helpful. Talk with the doctor about appropriate exercise.
- Discourage afternoon napping.
- Plan a structured, quiet activity in the late afternoon such as a card game or listening to music together.
- Limit distractions in the evening, such as television, loud music and chores.

More on next page ➔
• Turn on lights well before sunset. Close curtains to reduce shadows.
• Place a nightlight in the person’s bedroom, bathroom and hallway.
• Place clocks where the person can see them.
• Allow the person to sleep where he or she is most comfortable.
• Lock doors and block stairs with tall gates. Put away dangerous items.
• Install door sensors and motion detectors to alert you when the person is wandering.
• Consider buying a medical alarm with a global positioning system (GPS) that can find your loved one’s location when worn by him or her.
• Have others help with caregiving so that you can sleep. Take naps when possible to feel rested.

Talk to your doctor for help. There may be a medical problem that is making it hard for the person to sleep. Your doctor may be able to order medicine to help the person relax and sleep. Sundowning peaks during the middle stages of dementia. It will occur less often as the disease progresses.

Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.