



Good habits for bedtime

Caring for someone with dementia



DementiaUK
Helping families face dementia

Looking after someone with dementia

Caring for someone with dementia can be really difficult at times. That's why Dementia UK provides specialist dementia nurses — Admiral Nurses — who work with families during the toughest times, giving them the specialist techniques and tools they need to cope.

Dementia and sleep

Dementia affects everyone with a diagnosis differently. But sleep disturbance and issues around bedtime can be very common. If you are caring for someone with dementia who is unsettled during the night, it can mean that neither of you are getting enough sleep.

Dementia can cause confusion and anxiety, which some people find seems to get worse during the evening, and before bedtime. Providing reassurance for the person with dementia can be the most powerful way to help them feel calmer and more ready to go to bed. This can involve simply sitting with them and telling them that is OK, and that you are with them.

There are several other factors which affect sleep, as well as methods you can try to help the person with dementia to sleep better. We will look at these in this leaflet.

Establishing good habits: going outside

A good place to start is by considering what the person is doing during the day as this will have an effect on how tired or restless they are at night.

Some of the things that can make a person less likely to be tired at bed time are:

- inactivity during the day.
Too much sitting, and being physically and mentally inactive
- a lack of fresh air and sunlight

Many people with dementia spend a lot of time indoors, missing out on the stimulation and exercise that can help make them ready for bed at night time.

Consider things you can do to help a person with dementia go outside, such as:

- a walk around the block
- a trip to a park or garden centre
- simply sitting in a garden if they have mobility issues

Your mobility, and the mobility of the person with dementia, will affect how possible these options are.



If you have mobility issues, please consider asking your friends, family and neighbours to sometimes help with taking the person you care for outside for a while. Sometimes, the people around you want to help but don't know how. You might find that by suggesting they take the person out for a short walk, or simply for a sit down elsewhere, that they are glad to be of help.

Establishing good habits: food and drink

The food and drink a person with dementia consumes can have an impact upon their sleep pattern.

Try to watch what they eat and drink throughout the day to see what makes a difference. You could try:

- eating heavier meals at lunch time rather than during the evening
- avoiding sugary food later in the day
- reducing any caffeine and alcohol intake the person with dementia has

If they like to have a cup of tea or coffee, consider swapping to decaffeinated types. A herbal tea, such a chamomile, or a warm



milky drink can be calming before bed time. If the person has always enjoyed a glass of wine or beer in the evening, look for low alcohol varieties.

Establishing good habits: routine

Having a nightly routine can be reassuring and calming for a person with dementia. Knowing what is going to happen next can help them to feel relaxed and comfortable. You could try:

- encouraging and supporting them to have a warm bath or shower
- taking some relaxing time before bed, listening to music or reading a book

Setting the scene for bed

It's important to take into account the preferences of the person with dementia.

Often, the best way to find out the sleep pattern of a person with dementia is to talk to them and ask. We are all different and have varied body clocks and preferences. If the person is unable to tell you, try different things to see what works best. You could try:

- checking the temperature of the person's bedroom, to make sure it's not too hot or cold
- making sure their bedclothes are suitable for the season. Being too hot or cold in the night can cause a person to wake up
- finding out if the person prefers to sleep in darkness or would like a night light

If the person tends to get up in the night, to use the toilet or to wander around, you might want to have a light on for them, in the room or in the corridor. Keeping the bathroom light on and the door open can help them find their way to the toilet. Remember to keep the pathway to the bathroom clear.

In the summertime, when the evenings are lighter, it can help maintain a routine by pulling the curtains or blinds at the same time each evening.

Sometimes, medication can aid sleep. But sleeping medication must be used with caution and under the guidance of your GP.

Lastly, think back to the person's preferences for bed time before they received their diagnosis of dementia. If they liked to go to bed late at night, that preference will probably stay the same, and so it will be difficult to get them ready for bed earlier in the evening.



Sources of support

If you have any further questions about helping a person with dementia get ready for bed, or any other aspect of caring for someone with dementia, please call the specialist dementia nurses on the Admiral Nurse Dementia Helpline, open Monday to Friday, 9am – 9pm, and 9am – 5pm at weekends, on **0800 888 6678** or helpline@dementiauk.org

[Dementia UK leaflet on Sundowning](#)

The information in this booklet is written and reviewed by dementia specialist Admiral Nurses.

We are always looking to improve our resources, to provide the most relevant support for families living with dementia. If you have feedback about any of our leaflets, please email feedback@dementiauk.org

We receive no government funding and rely on voluntary donations, including gifts in Wills.

For more information on how to support Dementia UK, please visit www.dementiauk.org/donate or call **0300 365 5500**.

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If you're caring for someone with dementia or if you have any other concerns or questions, call or email our Admiral Nurses for specialist support and advice.



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Saturday and Sunday, 9am – 5pm

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