

QUICK TIPS

Better Sleep for People Living with Dementia

Sleep problems are common for people living with dementia – but small changes can help. Here are practical, non-drug tips to improve sleep and nighttime comfort.

Understand Possible Causes

- Neuro changes disrupt the brain's sleep-wake clock.
- Day/night confusion (circadian rhythm disruption) is common.
- Pain or discomfort may go unnoticed – always rule this out.
- Medications may cause insomnia or drowsiness – check side effects.
- Anxiety, stress, or new situations can increase nighttime waking.
- Environment (noise, lighting, temperature) may interfere with sleep.
- Sleep disorders like sleep apnea or restless leg syndrome can worsen sleep.

Daily Tips to Try

- Keep a regular daily schedule: Same wake-up, meals, activities, and bedtime.
- Encourage daytime activity: Gentle walks, household tasks, or gardening.
- Limit naps: If needed, keep them short and early in the day.
- Monitor food & drink: Avoid caffeine, alcohol, nicotine late in the day.
- Offer light, calming snacks before bed (e.g., warm milk, banana).

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Create a Calm Sleep Environment

- Make sure the bedroom is quiet, cool, and comfortable.
- Block out unwanted light with blackout curtains.
- Reduce noise with white noise or soft music if needed.
- Use nightlights to reduce confusion if they wake up.
- Keep familiar, comforting items nearby — a favorite blanket, photos, or pillow.

Build a Relaxing Bedtime Routine

- Offer a warm bath or foot soak.
- Play soft music or calming sounds.
- Try a gentle hand or shoulder massage.
- Read aloud or listen to an audiobook together.
- Keep the routine the same every night to cue “it’s time to sleep.”

Support Emotional Comfort

- Check for worries such as did something happen today?
- Offer reassurance and comforting words if they wake up.
- Sometimes, a phone call to family or a favorite song helps settle worries.
- If sundowning is an issue, use calming activities in the late afternoon.

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Watch for Medical Issues

- Talk to a doctor if you suspect pain, sleep apnea, or medication side effects.
- Keep a sleep diary for a week — note naps, meals, behavior changes, and when they wake.
- Bring this info to medical appointments.

When Medication May Be Needed

- Medications can sometimes help — but always balance benefits and risks.
- Supplements such as Melatonin could be tried on a low dose and increase if needed
- Use medication only under medical advice — be aware of side effects like confusion or falls.

Sleep challenges can mean the person is trying to tell you something. Look for clues, respond with patience, and try to uncover the root cause instead of masking it with medication alone. Wishing you and your family sweet dreams!

