



“No, It’s Not Morning Yet” An Overview of Sundowning in Seniors

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A. Defining SUNDOWNING

1. Sundowning is also known as “Sundown Syndrome” and is the delirium or confusion which is onset during the evening or night, more pronounced with the setting of the Sun, with improvement or disappearance noted during the day, most often seen in mid and later stages of dementing disorders, such as Alzheimer’s disease
2. Sundowning is NOT a DISEASE, but a SYMPTOM of dementia, depression, poor nutrition, or of unknown causes
3. Clinical features may include mood swings, abnormally demanding attitude, suspiciousness, and visual and auditory hallucinations
4. Considered to be the second most common type of disruptive behavior in institutionalized patients with dementia after wandering

B. What may trigger Sundowning?

1. Fatigue
2. Change in diet
3. Low lighting
4. Increased shadows
5. Disruption of the body's "internal clock"
6. Evening shift change

C. How can Sundowning be reduced?

1. Plan for activities and exercise to ensure the need for a restful sleep
2. Coordinate group activities
3. Increase exposure to natural light during the day to encourage nighttime sleepiness
4. Limit caffeine and sugar to morning hours
5. Serve dinner early and offer a light snack before bedtime
6. Keep a night light on when surroundings are dark or unfamiliar
7. Bring familiar or nostalgic items such as photographs, knickknacks or a radio from home
8. Natural supplements such as melatonin have shown some effectiveness

D. GLYCEMIC INDEX in the Management of Sundowning

1. All carbohydrate-containing foods have a glycemic number based on a comparison to pure glucose, which has a glycemic index of 100
2. Complex carbs have a very low glycemic index and help to maintain a very stable blood sugar level throughout the day
3. NOT just for managing diabetes, but is also effective at managing mental health conditions, cognitive decline, and dementia
4. Avoids the severe spikes and dangerous troughs of blood sugar levels
5. Registered Dietitians design strategies to control the glycemic index