



Supporting Healthy Sleep Patterns



Irregular sleep patterns are common for people with dementia. Use these practical tips to support healthy sleep hygiene for the person you care for and for yourself.

Identify patterns:

Start a sleep log and evaluate your findings.

Monitor the person's sleep activity for 3-5 days, including naps. Then observe: what is waking them up?

- **Do they need the restroom?**
 - Consider ways to make the restroom routine easier, such as a bedside commode.
 - Discuss possible medical conditions with the person's doctor.
 - Note: hydration is important—so it isn't a good idea to eliminate or limit fluid intake.
- **Are they easily awakened by noise?**
 - Try a sound machine or ear plugs to minimize disturbance.
- **Are they comfortable?**
 - Consider the temperature of the room and adjust as necessary.
 - If they are in pain, try repositioning pillows and blankets. You can also discuss pain management options with the doctor.

Is it a problem?

- **A sleep pattern is problematic if the person is:**
 - Sleeping so much that they are missing meals.
 - Unable to engage in meaningful activities.
 - Awake all night and cannot be independent.
- **A sleep pattern is not problematic if the person is:**
 - Napping throughout the day, but wakes easily for meals, conversation, and activities.
 - Rested and comfortable—remember that it's natural to sleep a little more as we age.

Create a sleep routine:

Important tips for both you and the person with dementia:

- Begin your sleep routine at the same time every evening.
 - Consider lifelong patterns: if the person has always been a "night owl", support that preference if possible.
- Ensure the person has had enough exercise during the day. Consider working with a physical therapist to establish an appropriate exercise routine.
- Dim the lights approximately 30-45 minutes before going to bed.
- Avoid use of electronics: bright screens send signals to the brain that it's time to be awake!
- Introduce calming sounds and breathing exercises to set the body up for restful sleep.
- Remember that it takes time to train the body. Stick with a consistent schedule for a few weeks to make a real, lasting change.

Contact Seniors At Home's Center for Dementia Care
Call 415-449-3700, email dementiacare@jfps.org or visit seniorsathome.org