

WHY IS MUM OR DAD AWAKE AT NIGHT?

A practical family guide to understanding sleep changes



DEMENTIA & NIGHT-TIME WAKING

Possible reasons

What may help



Your Care

Start with what has changed

A difficult night can have more than one cause. Notice what is different for this person before you try to change the routine.

Tick what you have noticed recently:

- ☐ Waking more often, or at a different time
- ☐ Long or frequent naps during the day
- ☐ Pain, illness, fever or discomfort
- ☐ Needing the toilet more often
- ☐ New anxiety or confusion after waking
- ☐ Distress towards the late afternoon or evening
- ☐ A new medicine or a change in dose
- ☐ Changes in caffeine or alcohol intake



Worth knowing

Dementia can affect the body clock, but pain, illness or medicines may also be involved.



Your Care

What could be behind it?

Use these possibilities as prompts, not a diagnosis. Several may overlap.

1

Body clock

Dementia can make a person less sleepy at night and less alert during the day.

2

Physical discomfort

Pain, constipation, illness or needing the toilet can interrupt sleep.

3

Medicines and drinks

Some medicines and late caffeine or alcohol can make sleep harder.

4

Feeling disorientated

Someone who wakes may not know whether it is night or morning.

5

Late-day distress

Some people become more unsettled towards evening, sometimes called sundowning.

One useful question

"What might be waking Mum or Dad before we assume it is dementia?"



Your Care

5 things to try during the day

Try one or two changes, then notice what suits the person. Their preferences and lifelong sleep habits matter.



1

Keep familiar times

A regular time to rise, eat and settle can make the day easier to follow.

2

Bring in daylight

Open curtains and, if possible, spend some time outdoors.

3

Make the day meaningful

Enjoyable movement, company or activities may help build sleepiness.

4

Look at long naps

If long naps are a pattern, try shorter or earlier rests when comfortable.

5

Check the bedroom

Think about pain, temperature, bedding, a nightlight and a clear route to the toilet.

If they wake

Stay calm, check for a practical need and offer reassurance.



Your Care

A seven-day sleep note

You do not need to record every minute. A few notes can reveal a pattern and help when you speak to the GP.

DAY	AWAKE AT	DAY NAPS	WHAT YOU NOTICED
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			

Bring these notes to a GP

Also record any changes in pain, illness, medicines or mood.



Your Care

When to ask for help

You do not have to work it out alone. Tell a clinician what has changed and bring your notes.

BOOK A GP REVIEW

If waking persists, gets worse or affects wellbeing, ask the GP to consider pain, toileting, breathing, anxiety, falls and medicines. Do not change medicine without advice.

Bring the sleep note and an up-to-date medicine list.

SUDDEN NEW CONFUSION NEEDS URGENT HELP

NHS guidance says to get medical help immediately if someone suddenly becomes confused. Call 999 or go to A&E. A sudden change can have a treatable cause.

Tell the clinician when the change started.

COULD PRACTICAL DAYTIME SUPPORT HELP?

A consistent, matched Personal Assistant can help with meals, company, getting out and familiar routines at home. Your Care does not provide overnight or medical care.

Further reading: Alzheimer's Society (sleep); NHS (sudden confusion)

Talk to Your Care | 0117 947 7422



Your Care