

The role of caring for someone with dementia can take a toll on both of you, with sleep disturbances a common challenge. Talk to the doctor or service provider to find out what help is available. Sometimes the following factors impact sleep.

- Mental and physical exhaustion at the end of the day
- A need for less sleep, which is common among older adults.
- Disorientation and anxiety
- Reduced lighting and increased shadows (may cause confusion).

### **Hints to Promote Better Sleep:**

- Look for underlying conditions, e.g. depression, arthritis or restless legs syndrome may impact night-time sleep patterns.
- Establish a regular nightly routine.
- Avoid stimulants such as coffee, alcohol, or nicotine.
- Avoid turning on the TV during periods of wakefulness.
- Encourage physical activity during the day.
- Limit daytime sleep.
- Set a peaceful mood in the evening.
- Check with doctor if you think medications may play a role.
- Think about light and possible shadows.
- Talk to a GP, family, friends or service provider for additional support.

### **Cultivate Healthy Daily Habits**

*Sleep hygiene relates to a bedroom environment and daily routine that promotes sleep. Ensuring your bedroom is comfortable, following a relaxing pre-bed routine, and creating healthy habits during the day can contribute to sleep hygiene.*

- Get daylight exposure: light especially sunlight may help promote sleep.
- Don't eat late as you may still be digesting as you prepare for bed.
- Invest in a comfortable mattress and pillow.
- Be mindful of bedding as the sheets are the first thing you touch when you get in bed.
- Set a cool but comfortable temperature.
- Block out light.
- Add a little plant life: Aloe Vera is suggested to produce oxygen at night, while snake plants are said to purify the air. Lavender has been known to bring calmness, and jasmine is suggested to improve productivity the next day.
- Slip on some socks: warm hands and feet are said to improve sleep.
- While warm feet may help your comfort, a cooler body temperature may help you fall asleep faster.

- Get out of bed: staying in bed and fretting about not sleeping may make falling asleep more difficult, perhaps read a book, but don't watch TV or use a computer.
- Breathing exercises: when you are relaxed, your breath becomes deeper and slower, so learn some breathing exercises such as box breathing.
- Tell Yourself a Story: as parents we read stories to our children to put them to sleep. Pick up a book you enjoy, but ensure it is fiction as nonfiction puts your brain into problem-solving mode. As you lie in the dark, try relating a story from a book you have already read, and recall the plot.
- Try reading to the person living with dementia prior to bedtime.

**Take a 'Mental Vacation' and try visualisation:**

*How to do it:*

- Go to a happy place that works for you. Perhaps imagine yourself sitting on the beach. Notice the waves producing a soothing noise; feel a cool breeze blowing on your face; feel your hands rummaging through the damp sand as the waves crash over the sand.
- Visualisation may be improved though using more than one sense.

## Nostril Breathing

*Inhale Through Your Left Nostril:*

- Put a finger on your right nostril and breathe through the left nostril, taking slow and deep breaths. According to some practices the left nostril slows you down and helps keep you relaxed. The right nostril may be associated with action.

**Physical Tools:** the most basic layer for sleep hygiene.

- Nutrition
- Exercise
- Environmental

**Emotional Tools:** if physical tools aren't in place, it's harder to address emotional tools.

- Acknowledge your emotions: if there are painful emotions recognise them.
- Stop and be mindful of your thinking. Listen to your thoughts, challenge them and choose whether they are beneficial to you, and if not, let them go.
- Practice creating the thoughts and emotions you want.