

DR. VERA'S
DEMENTIA ACTION MANUALS

stop the 3 a.m. madness! and get your nights back



What to Say and Do to End Sundowning,
Night Wandering and Sleepless Nights

DR. FERNANDO VERA, OT

DR. VERA'S DEMENTIA ACTION MANUALS • BOOK 2

STOP THE 3 A.M. MADNESS!

What to Say and Do to End Sundowning, Night Wandering and
Sleepless Nights

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StartEmpowering.com

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Important: This manual is for education and support. It does not replace medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Talk with the doctor about any new, sudden or worsening sleep problem, and before starting, stopping or changing any medication or supplement. In an emergency, call 911.

Names used in the sample phrases are examples.

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The nights don't have to feel like this.

If you're reading this, you're probably tired in a way that sleep alone doesn't fix. Maybe your loved one is up at 3 a.m. getting dressed for a job they retired from decades ago. Maybe every evening turns into tears or anger as the sun goes down.

I've lived these nights. As an occupational therapist who runs a dementia clinic, I help families with this every week. And with my own mother, Virginia, I learned how quickly sleepless nights can break down even the strongest caregiver.

Here's what I want you to know: **nights are won during the day.** Morning light, daytime activity, a calm afternoon and a steady bedtime routine can reset a body clock that dementia has thrown off.

This manual covers 25 of the most common night problems, from sundowning to 3 a.m. wandering to your own exhaustion. Each one shows you what to say and do, and what to stop doing.

Start with the 24-hour sleep reset on page 6. Give it two weeks. Then use the rest of the book for the specific problems you're facing.

And please, take care of your own sleep too. You can't pour from an empty cup, and you deserve rest as much as they do.

Fernando

Dr. Fernando Vera, OT

Check it. Fix it. Follow up.

Every night problem gets a two-page spread. The left page helps you spot the problem and gives you a plan for tonight and tomorrow. The right page gives you the words to say, what to track and when to check again.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

How the problem usually shows up, so you know you're on the right page.

1 • QUICK CHECK

A short checklist. Tick what applies to your family to see if this page is for you.

3 • WHAT TO SAY

Word-for-word phrases you can use right away.

4 • FOLLOW UP

When to check again, and when to call a professional.

WHY IT HAPPENS

The most common reasons behind it. Knowing the reason often shows you the fix.

2 • ACTION PLAN

Two steps for tonight (in the moment) and two for tomorrow (prevention).

TRACK IT

What to write in your sleep diary so you can see patterns.

Dr. Vera's tip

One practical trick from the clinic and from caring for my own mother.

☒ DO THIS NOW

☐ DO THIS MONTH

☐ WHEN YOU CAN

Every topic has a badge so you know what matters most.

Three rules that apply to every page

1. Protect the morning: light, breakfast and activity set up the night.
2. At night, keep it dark, quiet and boring.
3. If it's not working, stop, step away, and try again in 20 minutes.

The **24-hour** sleep reset

Nights are won during the day. These four steps work together to reset a broken body clock. Start them all, and give it two weeks.

1 Morning light

- Open curtains right away
- Breakfast by a bright window
- Same wake-up time every day
- Outside for 20 minutes if you can

2 Midday movement

- A walk or chair exercise
- Meaningful tasks and chores
- One short nap before 2 p.m.
- Social time and conversation

3 Afternoon calm

- Snack and water at 3 p.m.
- Lights on before 4 p.m.
- Quiet, familiar activities
- No caffeine after lunch

4 Evening wind-down

- Light dinner by 6 p.m.
- Screens off an hour before bed
- The same bedtime routine
- Dark, cool, quiet bedroom

Win the day, and the night gets easier.

BEFORE ANYTHING ELSE

Bad nights often have a medical cause.

When sleep suddenly gets worse, look for a physical problem first. Many 'behavior' problems at night are pain, infection or medication side effects.

Common hidden causes

- ✓ Pain: joints, back, teeth, skin
- ✓ Urinary tract infection
- ✓ Constipation
- ✓ Sleep apnea (loud snoring, pauses)
- ✓ Restless legs
- ✓ New or changed medications
- ✓ Caffeine or alcohol
- ✓ Depression or anxiety

Call 911 right away if

- ! Anyone is in immediate danger
- ! They are missing after a short search
- ! A fall with a head injury, or they can't get up
- ! Trouble breathing or chest pain
- ! Face drooping, arm weakness or slurred speech
- ! Sudden severe confusion or they can't be woken

You don't have to figure this out alone. The Alzheimer's Association helpline is free and open 24/7, including the middle of the night.

1-800-272-3900

part one

Understand the Night



Why nights go wrong, and how to find the real cause before you try to fix it.

In this part

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-

Remember the 24-hour reset

Morning light • **Midday** movement • **Afternoon** calm • **Evening** wind-down

01

Sundowning: Late-Afternoon Confusion and Agitation

DO THIS NOW

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

From about 3 or 4 p.m., confusion, pacing, anxiety or anger build. Mornings are usually better.

WHY IT HAPPENS

A tired brain, fading daylight, hunger, pain and a disrupted body clock pile up by late afternoon.

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like your nights?

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Confusion or agitation starts around 3 to 5 p.m. | ☐ The house gets dim in the late afternoon. |
| ☐ Mornings are noticeably better than evenings. | ☐ Visitors, errands or baths happen late in the day. |
| ☐ They pace, argue or get teary as it gets dark. | ☐ They nap for long stretches after lunch. |

Checked 2 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Tonight, then tomorrow

1

Lower the noise and offer tea and familiar music.

A calm activity resets the moment better than words.

TONIGHT

2

Turn on every main light and close the curtains.

Bright, even light fights the dusk confusion.

TONIGHT

3

Get morning sunlight and a walk before noon.

Daylight sets the body clock for the whole day.

TOMORROW

4

Move appointments, baths and visitors to the morning.

Save the hard things for their best hours.

TOMORROW

TONIGHT = what to do in the moment • TOMORROW = how to prevent it

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

01

Sundowning: Late-Afternoon Confusion and Agitation

continued

3

WHAT TO SAY Soft, simple words for the evening and night

say
this

"I'm right here. We're safe."

"Could you help me fold these towels?"

"Let's sit by the window together."

+

TRACK IT IN YOUR SLEEP DIARY

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ What time the confusion started. | ☐ Whether they napped or skipped lunch. |
| ☐ What happened just before. | ☐ What calmed them down. |

4

FOLLOW UP

CHECK AGAIN IN 2 WEEKS

Look at your sleep diary. Is sundowning starting later or ending sooner?

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

It gets suddenly worse, or comes with fever, pain or new confusion. Ask for a medication review.

Dr. Vera's tip

*Set a phone alarm for 3:30 p.m. that says 'Lights on, snack, music.'
Beat sundowning before it starts.*

02

Days and Nights Mixed Up

DO THIS NOW

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Sleeping much of the day, then awake, alert and busy in the middle of the night.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Dementia damages the brain's internal clock. Little daylight and little activity make it worse.

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like your nights?

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ They sleep much of the day. | ☐ Wake-up times change from day to day. |
| ☐ They're wide awake and busy at night. | ☐ Meals are at different times each day. |
| ☐ They rarely go outside. | ☐ The TV runs late into the night. |

Checked 2 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Tonight, then tomorrow

1

Keep the lights low and the house quiet at night.

Darkness tells the brain it's nighttime.

TONIGHT

2

Offer a calm, boring activity instead of arguing.

Folding towels in dim light is better than a fight.

TONIGHT

3

Open curtains and have breakfast by a bright window.

Morning light is the strongest body-clock reset.

TOMORROW

4

Set the same wake-up time every day, even after a bad night.

Consistency rebuilds the rhythm.

TOMORROW

TONIGHT = what to do in the moment • TOMORROW = how to prevent it

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

02 Days and Nights Mixed Up

continued

3 WHAT TO SAY Soft, simple words for the evening and night

say
this

"Good morning! Let's open the curtains."

"Come help me water the plants."

"It's lunchtime. Let's eat together."

+ TRACK IT IN YOUR SLEEP DIARY

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Wake-up time and bedtime. | ☐ Nap times and length. |
| ☐ Time spent outside or near a bright window. | ☐ Hours slept at night. |

4 FOLLOW UP

CHECK AGAIN IN 2 WEEKS

Compare the first and second week of the diary. Is nighttime sleep getting longer?

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

The pattern is new or sudden, or they seem much sleepier than usual during the day.

Dr. Vera's tip

Breakfast by the brightest window in the house. It's the easiest light therapy there is.

03

Too Much Napping

DO THIS MONTH

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Dozing in the chair for hours, long afternoon naps, falling asleep in front of the TV.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Boredom, low activity, medications, depression and a broken body clock all increase daytime sleep.

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like your nights?

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ They doze off in the chair for hours. | ☐ Afternoons are mostly TV and sitting. |
| ☐ Naps happen after 2 p.m. | ☐ They seem sleepier since a medication change. |
| ☐ They nap in bed during the day. | ☐ They seem bored or low in mood. |

Checked 2 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Tonight, then tomorrow

1

If they're wide awake at bedtime, keep things calm and dim.

Don't force bed; keep the environment sleepy.

TONIGHT

2

Skip the late snack of caffeine or chocolate.

Late stimulants add to the problem.

TONIGHT

3

Limit naps to one, 30 minutes, before 2 p.m., in a chair.

Short, early naps protect night sleep.

TOMORROW

4

Plan an activity for their drowsiest time of day.

A walk, a call or a simple chore keeps them awake.

TOMORROW

TONIGHT = what to do in the moment · TOMORROW = how to prevent it

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

03 Too Much Napping

continued

3 WHAT TO SAY Soft, simple words for the evening and night

say
this

"Let's take a walk to the mailbox."

"I need your help with this."

"Let's call your sister."

+ TRACK IT IN YOUR SLEEP DIARY

- ☐ Each nap: start time and length.
- ☐ Where they napped (bed or chair).
- ☐ What activity was planned in the afternoon.
- ☐ How they slept that night.

4 FOLLOW UP

CHECK AGAIN IN 1 WEEK

Add up nap time for the week. Is it going down as night sleep improves?

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

They're sleeping most of the day, or daytime sleepiness is new. Medications and depression can cause it.

Dr. Vera's tip

Nap in a chair, not in bed. The bed is for nighttime, and the body learns the difference.

04

Hidden Medical Causes of Bad Nights

DO THIS NOW

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Restless nights, frequent waking, moaning, or getting up again and again with no clear reason.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Pain, a full bladder, infections, constipation, sleep apnea, restless legs and medications often hide behind 'bad nights.'

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like your nights?

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ They moan, grimace or guard part of the body. | ☐ They get up many times to urinate. |
| ☐ They snore loudly or stop breathing in sleep. | ☐ They've been constipated. |
| ☐ Their legs kick or twitch at night. | ☐ Sleep changed after a new medication. |

Checked 2 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Tonight, then tomorrow

1

Ask 'Does anything hurt? Show me where.'

Pain is a common hidden cause of bad nights.

TONIGHT

2

Check for a full bladder, being too hot or too cold.

Simple needs are easy to fix.

TONIGHT

3

Book a doctor visit for a pain and medication review.

Fix the cause before trying sleep medicine.

TOMORROW

4

Record snoring or leg movements on your phone.

A short video helps the doctor diagnose.

TOMORROW

TONIGHT = what to do in the moment • TOMORROW = how to prevent it

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

04 Hidden Medical Causes of Bad Nights

continued

3 WHAT TO SAY Soft, simple words for the evening and night

say
this

"Show me where it hurts."

"Do you need the bathroom?"

"Are you too hot or too cold?"

+ TRACK IT IN YOUR SLEEP DIARY

☐ Signs of pain at night.

☐ Number of bathroom trips.

☐ Snoring, gasping or kicking.

☐ Any new medications.

4 FOLLOW UP

CHECK AGAIN AFTER THE DOCTOR VISIT

After any treatment change, compare two weeks of sleep before and after.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

Sleep suddenly gets worse, or there's pain, fever, burning with urination, snoring with pauses or new confusion.

Dr. Vera's tip

Before any sleep medicine, ask the doctor for a pain and medication review. It fixes more bad nights than pills do.

part two

The Afternoon Defense



Sundowning starts long before dark. These pages help you get ahead of the late-afternoon storm.

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Remember the 24-hour reset

Morning light • **Midday** movement • **Afternoon** calm • **Evening** wind-down

05

The 4 P.M. Crash

DO THIS NOW

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Irritable, tearful or stubborn in the late afternoon. Small requests turn into big fights.

WHY IT HAPPENS

The brain works hard all day to make sense of things. By late afternoon, it's worn out.

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like your nights?

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Moods drop sharply between 3 and 5 p.m. | ☐ Afternoons are packed with tasks or outings. |
| ☐ Small requests turn into big fights in the afternoon. | ☐ There's no rest break after lunch. |
| ☐ They skip or eat little at lunch. | ☐ They get more tearful or stubborn as the day goes on. |

Checked 2 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Tonight, then tomorrow

1

Stop the task and offer a snack and water.

A tired, hungry brain can't cope with demands.

TONIGHT

2

Switch to something familiar and easy.

Folding, music or photos calm the crash.

TONIGHT

3

Schedule a 3 p.m. 'pit stop': snack, water, bathroom, music.

Recharge before the crash hits.

TOMORROW

4

Move hard tasks like baths and errands to the morning.

Protect the afternoon.

TOMORROW

TONIGHT = what to do in the moment · TOMORROW = how to prevent it

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

05 The 4 P.M. Crash

continued

3 WHAT TO SAY Soft, simple words for the evening and night

say
this

"Let's sit and have a snack."

"You've worked hard today."

"We can do that tomorrow."

+ TRACK IT IN YOUR SLEEP DIARY

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ What time the crash started. | ☐ What task was going on. |
| ☐ What they ate at lunch and 3 p.m. | ☐ What helped them recover. |

4 FOLLOW UP

CHECK AGAIN IN 2 WEEKS

Is the afternoon crash shorter or milder since starting the 3 p.m. pit stop?

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

Afternoons suddenly get much worse, or there are signs of pain or infection.

Dr. Vera's tip

Treat 3 p.m. like a pit stop: snack, water, bathroom, music. Five minutes can save the evening.

06

Fading Light and Shadows

DO THIS NOW

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

More confusion at dusk; scared of shadows, reflections in windows or dark corners.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Aging eyes need more light, and dementia makes shadows and reflections easy to misread.

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like your nights?

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Confusion increases as daylight fades. | ☐ Only one lamp is on in the evening. |
| ☐ They're scared of shadows or dark corners. | ☐ Mirrors or glass doors reflect at night. |
| ☐ They see 'people' in dark windows. | ☐ Hallways and bathrooms are dim. |

Checked 2 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Tonight, then tomorrow

1

Turn on more lights and close the curtains now.

Remove the shadows that are causing fear.

TONIGHT

2

Say 'Let me make it brighter so we can see.'

Fixing the light fixes the fear.

TONIGHT

3

Put main lamps on timers or smart plugs set for 4 p.m.

The house handles sunset automatically.

TOMORROW

4

Walk through the house at dusk and fix dark spots.

Add lamps and cover reflective glass.

TOMORROW

TONIGHT = what to do in the moment · TOMORROW = how to prevent it

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

06 Fading Light and Shadows

continued

3 WHAT TO SAY Soft, simple words for the evening and night

say
this

"Let's make it nice and bright in here."

"I'll close the curtains."

"You're safe with me."

+ TRACK IT IN YOUR SLEEP DIARY

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ What time they became uneasy. | ☐ Which room they were in. |
| ☐ What they said they saw. | ☐ Whether more light helped. |

4 FOLLOW UP

CHECK AGAIN IN 1 WEEK

Walk through the house at dusk again.
Are there any remaining dark corners or reflections?

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

They're seeing people or animals that aren't there, especially if it's new.

Dr. Vera's tip

Put your lamps on a smart plug or timer set for 4 p.m. The house handles sunset for you.



Busy, Noisy Evenings

DO THIS MONTH

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Agitation when the TV is loud, family arrives, dinner is being cooked and everyone is talking.

WHY IT HAPPENS

A tired brain can't filter noise. Too much going on at once feels overwhelming.

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like your nights?

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Agitation rises when the TV is loud. | ☐ They leave the room or cover their ears. |
| ☐ Dinner prep, TV and talking all happen at once. | ☐ Several people talk to them at once. |
| ☐ Family visits happen in the evening. | ☐ They're calmer on quiet evenings. |

Checked 2 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Tonight, then tomorrow

1

Turn off the TV and lower voices.

Less noise means less overload.

TONIGHT

2

Take them to a quiet room with soft music.

A calm space lets them reset.

TONIGHT

3

Move family visits to morning or brunch.

Same love, far less chaos.

TOMORROW

4

Give them a quiet job during dinner prep.

Folding napkins away from the kitchen noise.

TOMORROW

TONIGHT = what to do in the moment · TOMORROW = how to prevent it

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

07 Busy, Noisy Evenings

continued

3 WHAT TO SAY Soft, simple words for the evening and night

say
this

"It's a bit loud in here. Let's step out."

"Sit with me for a minute."

"Let's listen to some music."

+ TRACK IT IN YOUR SLEEP DIARY

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ How many people were in the house. | ☐ When agitation started. |
| ☐ Whether the TV was on. | ☐ Whether a quiet room helped. |

4 FOLLOW UP

CHECK AGAIN IN 2 WEEKS

Compare busy evenings and quiet evenings in the diary. What's the difference in sleep?

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

Noise sensitivity is new or extreme, or they seem not to hear well. Check hearing and hearing aids.

Dr. Vera's tip

Ask visitors to come for brunch instead of dinner. Same love, far less chaos.

08

"I Want to Go Home" at Dusk

DO THIS NOW

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

As evening comes, they pack bags, look for the door or insist on going 'home.'

WHY IT HAPPENS

'Home' is often a feeling of safety. Evening confusion makes even their own house feel strange.

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like your nights?

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ They ask to 'go home' in the evening. | ☐ They try the front door in the evening. |
| ☐ They pack bags or look for their coat at dusk. | ☐ It happens more on tired or busy days. |
| ☐ They say 'This isn't my house.' | ☐ Arguing about it makes it worse. |

Checked 2 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Tonight, then tomorrow

1

Ask 'Tell me about your home' and listen.

Answer the feeling, not the fact.

TONIGHT

2

Offer a snack, photos or a short walk and 'come home.'

Meeting the need ends the search.

TONIGHT

3

Start a cozy evening routine before dusk.

Warm light, favorite music and familiar objects.

TOMORROW

4

Add door chimes or alarms.

Know right away if they try to leave.

TOMORROW

TONIGHT = what to do in the moment · TOMORROW = how to prevent it

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

08 "I Want to Go Home" at Dusk

continued

3 WHAT TO SAY Soft, simple words for the evening and nightsay
this*"You miss home. What's your favorite room there?"**"We'll go after dinner. Let's eat first."**"I'm here. You're safe with me."***+ TRACK IT IN YOUR SLEEP DIARY**

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ What time the request started. | ☐ What helped them settle. |
| ☐ What they said 'home' was. | ☐ Whether they tried to leave. |

4 FOLLOW UP**CHECK AGAIN IN 2 WEEKS**

Is the 'going home' request happening less often, or ending sooner?

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

It starts suddenly, comes with new confusion, or they try to leave often.

Dr. Vera's tip

Keep a 'going home' bag packed by the door with a sweater and photos. Carrying it often ends the search.



Pacing and Restlessness Before Dinner

DO THIS MONTH

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Walking back and forth, fidgeting, opening and closing drawers, unable to sit still.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Restless energy, hunger, boredom, pain or a need for the bathroom often build before dinner.

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like your nights?

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ They pace before dinner. | ☐ Dinner is late or irregular. |
| ☐ They open and close drawers or cabinets. | ☐ There's no walk or activity in the afternoon. |
| ☐ They can't sit still in the late afternoon. | ☐ They seem hungry or thirsty but don't ask. |

Checked 2 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Tonight, then tomorrow

1

Walk with them or give a walking job.

'Help me set the table' turns pacing into purpose.

TONIGHT

2

Check hunger, thirst, bathroom and pain.

Pacing often signals an unmet need.

TONIGHT

3

Plan a walk around 3 or 4 p.m. every day.

Burn restless energy before it builds.

TOMORROW

4

Make a 'busy basket' of towels, socks and cards to sort.

Hand it over at 4 p.m.

TOMORROW

TONIGHT = what to do in the moment · TOMORROW = how to prevent it

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

09 Pacing and Restlessness Before Dinner

continued

3 WHAT TO SAY Soft, simple words for the evening and night

say
this

"Let's go for a little walk."

"Can you carry these for me?"

"Do you need the bathroom?"

+ TRACK IT IN YOUR SLEEP DIARY

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ What time pacing started. | ☐ Food and drink in the afternoon. |
| ☐ Whether they had a walk that day. | ☐ What calmed them. |

4 FOLLOW UP

CHECK AGAIN IN 2 WEEKS

Is pacing shorter on days with an afternoon walk?

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

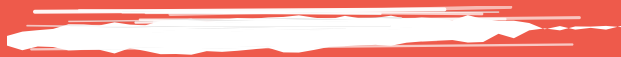
Pacing is new, constant, or they seem in pain. Some medications also cause restlessness.

Dr. Vera's tip

*Make a 'busy basket': towels to fold, socks to match, cards to sort.
Hand it over at 4 p.m.*

part three

The Wind-Down



A calm, predictable evening is the bridge to a better night.

In this part

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Remember the 24-hour reset

Morning light • **Midday** movement • **Afternoon** calm • **Evening** wind-down



Refusing to Go to Bed

DO THIS MONTH

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Saying they're not tired, arguing about bedtime, or staying up very late.

WHY IT HAPPENS

They may not feel tired, may be afraid of the dark or may not understand it's night.

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like your nights?

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ They say they're not tired at bedtime. | ☐ The bedroom is used for TV or other activities. |
| ☐ Bedtime changes from night to night. | ☐ They seem afraid to go to bed. |
| ☐ They argue or get upset about going to bed. | ☐ They go to bed and get right back up. |

Checked 2 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Tonight, then tomorrow

- 1 Invite, don't order: 'Let's get cozy.'**
An invitation to comfort beats a command.

TONIGHT

- 2 Stay a few minutes with soft music.**
Your presence helps them settle.

TONIGHT

- 3 Build a 30-minute bedtime routine, the same every night.**
Wash, pajamas, bathroom, music, lights low.

TOMORROW

- 4 Pick one 'bedtime song' and use it every night.**
Music becomes the cue their memory can't hold.

TOMORROW

TONIGHT = what to do in the moment • TOMORROW = how to prevent it

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

10 Refusing to Go to Bed

continued

3 WHAT TO SAY Soft, simple words for the evening and night

say
this

"Let's put on your soft pajamas."

"How about some warm milk first?"

"I'll sit with you for a while."

+ TRACK IT IN YOUR SLEEP DIARY

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Time the routine started. | ☐ Any resistance and what helped. |
| ☐ Time they fell asleep. | ☐ Night wakings. |

4 FOLLOW UP

CHECK AGAIN IN 2 WEEKS

Is it taking less time for them to fall asleep once the routine starts?

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

They're up most nights, or sleep has changed a lot recently.

Dr. Vera's tip

Use the same song every night as the 'bedtime song.' Music becomes the cue their memory can't hold.

11

Nighttime Bathroom Trips and Accidents

DO THIS NOW

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Up several times a night to use the bathroom, accidents in bed, or getting lost on the way.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Bladder changes, drinks late in the day, medications like diuretics and infections are common causes.

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like your nights?

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ They get up several times a night to urinate. | ☐ They drink a lot in the evening. |
| ☐ They have accidents in bed. | ☐ They take water pills later in the day. |
| ☐ They get lost on the way to the bathroom. | ☐ Bathroom trips have increased suddenly. |

Checked 2 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Tonight, then tomorrow

1

Light the path and walk with them.

Keep it calm and quiet.

TONIGHT

2

If there's an accident, keep it matter-of-fact.

'No problem, let's get you fresh.'

TONIGHT

3

Cut drinks 2 hours before bed and take a last bathroom trip.

But keep fluids up during the day.

TOMORROW

4

Ask the doctor about the timing of water pills and possible infection.

Some changes can cut night trips.

TOMORROW

TONIGHT = what to do in the moment • TOMORROW = how to prevent it

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

11 Nighttime Bathroom Trips and Accidents

continued

3 WHAT TO SAY Soft, simple words for the evening and night

say
this

"Let's stop at the bathroom first."

"No problem, let's get you fresh."

"Here's the light. I'll walk with you."

+ TRACK IT IN YOUR SLEEP DIARY

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Number of bathroom trips each night. | ☐ Evening drinks. |
| ☐ Accidents. | ☐ Any burning or new confusion. |

4 FOLLOW UP

CHECK AGAIN IN 1 WEEK

Count bathroom trips. If they're rising suddenly, call the doctor about a possible UTI.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

Sudden increase in bathroom trips, burning, fever or new confusion. It could be a urinary tract infection.

Dr. Vera's tip

Leave the bathroom light on and the door open. A glowing doorway is the easiest map at night.

12

Caffeine, Sugar and Late Meals

DO THIS MONTH

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Wired and restless at night after coffee, soda, chocolate or a heavy late dinner.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Caffeine lasts for hours. Heavy or late meals and sugar can disturb sleep.

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like your nights?

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ They drink coffee, tea or soda after lunch. | ☐ Dinner is heavy or late. |
| ☐ They eat chocolate or sweets in the evening. | ☐ They drink alcohol in the evening. |
| | ☐ They seem wired at bedtime. |
| | ☐ They get heartburn at night. |

Checked 2 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Tonight, then tomorrow

1

Offer warm milk or caffeine-free herbal tea.

Keep the ritual without the caffeine.

TONIGHT

2

If hungry, offer a small, light snack.

A banana or toast, not sweets.

TONIGHT

3

Switch to decaf after lunch, in their usual mug.

The habit stays; the caffeine doesn't.

TOMORROW

4

Serve a lighter dinner by 6 p.m.

Less digestion, easier sleep.

TOMORROW

TONIGHT = what to do in the moment • TOMORROW = how to prevent it

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

12 Caffeine, Sugar and Late Meals

continued

3 WHAT TO SAY Soft, simple words for the evening and night

say
this

"How about some warm milk or herbal tea?"

"Let's have a small snack."

"Here's your favorite mug."

+ TRACK IT IN YOUR SLEEP DIARY

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Caffeine after noon (what and when). | ☐ Evening snacks. |
| ☐ Dinner time and size. | ☐ Sleep quality that night. |

4 FOLLOW UP

CHECK AGAIN IN 2 WEEKS

Compare nights with and without afternoon caffeine.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

Sleep problems continue even after cutting caffeine. Ask about medications that act as stimulants.

Dr. Vera's tip

Put decaf in the regular coffee can. The habit stays the same; the caffeine doesn't.

13

Screens and Upsetting TV at Night

DO THIS MONTH

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Agitated or scared after the evening news, crime shows or loud programs.

WHY IT HAPPENS

What's on screen can feel real to someone with dementia. Bright screens also delay sleep.

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like your nights?

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ The news or crime shows are on in the evening. | ☐ They fall asleep with the TV on. |
| ☐ They get scared or upset after TV. | ☐ They use a tablet or phone in bed. |
| ☐ They think TV events are happening now. | ☐ Evenings are mostly screen time. |

Checked 2 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Tonight, then tomorrow

1

Turn off upsetting shows and switch to music.

Offer something better instead of 'stop watching.'

TONIGHT

2

Reassure them: 'That's on TV. We're safe here.'

Calm the fear first.

TONIGHT

3

Make a 'calm channel' playlist of nature, music and old favorites.

One button, no surprises.

TOMORROW

4

Turn off all screens an hour before bed.

Bright screens delay sleep.

TOMORROW

TONIGHT = what to do in the moment · TOMORROW = how to prevent it

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

13 Screens and Upsetting TV at Night

continued

3 WHAT TO SAY Soft, simple words for the evening and night

say
this

"Let's watch this nature show."

"How about some music?"

"Let's look at photos together."

+ TRACK IT IN YOUR SLEEP DIARY

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ What they watched in the evening. | ☐ When screens went off. |
| ☐ Any fear or agitation afterward. | ☐ How they slept. |

4 FOLLOW UP

CHECK AGAIN IN 2 WEEKS

Are evenings calmer since switching to the calm playlist?

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

They believe TV events are real and it causes lasting fear or distress.

Dr. Vera's tip

Make a 'calm channel' playlist on YouTube or your TV. One button, no surprises.

14

Anxiety and Fear at Bedtime

DO THIS NOW**WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE**

Worried, clingy or scared at bedtime; afraid of the dark or of being alone.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Night brings darkness, quiet and separation, which can feel frightening when memory is failing.

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like your nights?

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ They're clingy or worried at bedtime. | ☐ Anxiety is worse at night than during the day. |
| ☐ They're afraid of the dark. | ☐ They ask the same worried questions at bedtime. |
| ☐ They call for you after lights out. | |
| ☐ They don't want to be alone in the room. | |

Checked 2 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Tonight, then tomorrow**1 Sit with them and hold their hand.**

Your presence is the strongest comfort.

TONIGHT**2****Turn on a soft night light and give a comfort item.**

A familiar blanket or doll helps.

TONIGHT**3****Record yourself saying 'I'm right here. Sleep well.'**

Play it when they wake up scared.

TOMORROW**4****Keep the bedroom exactly the same every night.**

Familiar is calming.

TOMORROW

TONIGHT = what to do in the moment • **TOMORROW** = how to prevent it

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

14 Anxiety and Fear at Bedtime

continued

3 WHAT TO SAY Soft, simple words for the evening and night

say
this

"I'll be in the next room."

"Let's say goodnight to the family photos."

"Hold my hand for a bit."

+ TRACK IT IN YOUR SLEEP DIARY

☐ What they were worried about.

☐ How long until they settled.

☐ What comforted them.

☐ Night wakings.

4 FOLLOW UP

CHECK AGAIN IN 2 WEEKS

Is bedtime anxiety shorter with the comfort routine?

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

Fear or anxiety is severe, happens every night, or comes with hallucinations.

Dr. Vera's tip

Record yourself saying 'I'm right here. Sleep well. I love you.' Play it when they wake up scared.

part four

The Middle of the Night



What to say and do when the house should be asleep, and isn't.

In this part

- | | | |
|-----------|---|-------|
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| 16 | Nighttime Wandering and Trying to Leave | p. 46 |
| 17 | Getting Dressed for Work or Appointments at Night | p. 48 |
| 18 | Calling Out, Yelling or Moaning at Night | p. 50 |
| 19 | Nightmares and Waking Up Scared | p. 52 |
| 20 | Acting Out Dreams: Kicking or Punching in Sleep | p. 54 |
| 21 | Seeing Things in the Dark | p. 56 |
-

Remember the 24-hour reset

Morning light • **Midday** movement • **Afternoon** calm • **Evening** wind-down

15

Waking Up at 3 A.M. and Getting Up

DO THIS NOW

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Up in the middle of the night, dressing, turning on lights, or wandering the house.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Broken sleep cycles, daytime naps, a full bladder, pain or confusion about time.

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like your nights?

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ They wake between 1 and 4 a.m. | ☐ They get up to use the bathroom and don't settle. |
| ☐ They get dressed or turn on lights at night. | ☐ They seem confused about the time. |
| ☐ They nap in the afternoon. | ☐ You're woken up most nights. |

Checked 2 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Tonight, then tomorrow

1

Use a soft voice: 'It's still nighttime. Let's rest.'

Keep the brain in sleep mode.

TONIGHT

2

Keep lights low; offer the bathroom and water.

Meet the need without waking them fully.

TONIGHT

3

Limit naps and add daytime activity.

Tiredness at night starts in the day.

TOMORROW

4

Add a bed alarm or motion light.

Know right away when they get up.

TOMORROW

TONIGHT = what to do in the moment · TOMORROW = how to prevent it

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

15 Waking Up at 3 A.M. and Getting Up

continued

3 WHAT TO SAY Soft, simple words for the evening and night

say
this

"Do you need the bathroom?"

"Let's get a sip of water and rest."

"I'm here. Everything's fine."

+ TRACK IT IN YOUR SLEEP DIARY

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Time they woke. | ☐ How long until back to sleep. |
| ☐ What they needed or wanted. | ☐ Naps that day. |

4 FOLLOW UP

CHECK AGAIN IN 2 WEEKS

Look for patterns: do wakings happen at the same time? Plan around it.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

Night waking is new or frequent. Ask about sleep disorders, pain and medications.

Dr. Vera's tip

A motion-sensor light by the bed helps both of you: they can see, and it wakes you up too.

16

Nighttime Wandering and Trying to Leave

DO THIS NOW

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Walking the house at night, trying the doors, or leaving the house while you sleep.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Confusion about time, restlessness, searching for the bathroom or 'going home' or 'to work.'

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like your nights?

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ They walk around the house at night. | ☐ There are no door alarms. |
| ☐ They try the doors after dark. | ☐ Keys and coats are easy to reach. |
| ☐ They've left the house at night before. | ☐ Neighbors don't know about the risk. |

Checked 2 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Tonight, then tomorrow

1

Walk with them calmly and guide them back.

'Come with me. I'll walk you back.'

TONIGHT

2

If they're missing, search for no more than 15 minutes, then call 911.

Minutes matter.

TONIGHT

3

Install door alarms or chimes on every outside door.

They wake you before the street.

TOMORROW

4

Get a medical ID bracelet and keep a recent photo ready.

Be prepared before it happens.

TOMORROW

TONIGHT = what to do in the moment • TOMORROW = how to prevent it

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

16 Nighttime Wandering and Trying to Leave

continued

3 WHAT TO SAY Soft, simple words for the evening and night

say
this

"Let's go this way together."

"It's nighttime. Let's rest."

"Let's get a glass of water."

+ TRACK IT IN YOUR SLEEP DIARY

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Time and where they walked. | ☐ What they said they were looking for. |
| ☐ Whether they tried a door. | ☐ What helped them return to bed. |

4 FOLLOW UP

CHECK AGAIN EVERY MONTH

Test door alarms. Tell neighbors and keep the photo current.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

Wandering is frequent or they've left the house. Ask about sleep and medication review.

Dr. Vera's tip

Hang a dark curtain over the front door at night. Many people with dementia won't look for a door they can't see.



Getting Dressed for Work or Appointments at Night

DO THIS MONTH

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Putting on work clothes at 2 a.m., gathering keys and bags, or insisting they're late.

WHY IT HAPPENS

They may be living in an earlier time, when their body clock said it was time to get ready.

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like your nights?

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ They put on work clothes at night. | ☐ Clothes are laid out where they can see them. |
| ☐ They gather keys or bags in the dark. | ☐ The clock is hard to read. |
| ☐ They say they're late for work or an appointment. | ☐ It happens after daytime naps. |

Checked 2 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Tonight, then tomorrow

1

Join their reality: 'The office called. You have the day off.'

It ends the rush faster than correcting.

TONIGHT

2

Offer warm milk, then help back into pajamas.

Redirect gently.

TONIGHT

3

Put tomorrow's clothes out of sight.

Visible clothes trigger dressing.

TOMORROW

4

Add a clock that says 'NIGHT' or 'MORNING.'

Words are easier than reading time.

TOMORROW

TONIGHT = what to do in the moment • TOMORROW = how to prevent it

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

17

Getting Dressed for Work or Appointments at Night

continued

3

WHAT TO SAY Soft, simple words for the evening and night

say
this

"It's still night. We'll go in the morning."

"You work so hard. Rest tonight."

"Let's have some warm milk first."

+

TRACK IT IN YOUR SLEEP DIARY

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Time they got up to dress. | ☐ What calmed them. |
| ☐ Where they said they were going. | ☐ Naps that day. |

4

FOLLOW UP

CHECK AGAIN IN 2 WEEKS

Is it happening less since clothes are out of sight?

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

It happens often or comes with new confusion.

Dr. Vera's tip

Give them a morning 'job' like sorting mail or folding. Meeting the need to work by day calms the urge at night.

18

Calling Out, Yelling or Moaning at Night

DO THIS NOW

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Calling your name over and over, shouting, moaning or crying out during the night.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Pain, fear, loneliness, needing the bathroom, being too hot or cold, or not knowing where they are.

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like your nights?

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ They call your name over and over at night. | ☐ They're too hot or cold. |
| ☐ They shout, moan or cry out. | ☐ They're alone in a dark room. |
| ☐ They seem in pain. | ☐ It happens most nights. |

Checked 2 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Tonight, then tomorrow

1 Go to them and check pain, bathroom, temperature and position.

TONIGHT

Calling out is often the only way to ask for help.

2 Say 'I'm here. What do you need?' and stay a few minutes.

TONIGHT

Reassurance stops the calling.

3 Use a baby monitor so you can respond quickly.

TOMORROW

Faster comfort, less escalation.

4 Ask the doctor about a regular pain plan.

TOMORROW

Moaning at night is pain until proven otherwise.

TONIGHT = what to do in the moment • TOMORROW = how to prevent it

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

18 Calling Out, Yelling or Moaning at Night

continued

3 WHAT TO SAY Soft, simple words for the evening and night

say
this

"I'm right here."

"Are you hurting? Show me."

"Let me fix your blanket."

+ TRACK IT IN YOUR SLEEP DIARY

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Time and what they called out. | ☐ What helped. |
| ☐ Signs of pain. | ☐ How long it lasted. |

4 FOLLOW UP

CHECK AGAIN IN 1 WEEK

If calling out continues after comfort and a pain check, call the doctor.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

Calling out is new, constant, or they seem in pain.

Dr. Vera's tip

Moaning at night is pain until proven otherwise. Ask the doctor about a regular pain plan.



Nightmares and Waking Up Scared

DO THIS NOW

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Screaming, crying or shouting in their sleep; waking up frightened and confused.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Brain changes, medications, stressful days and past trauma can cause bad dreams.

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like your nights?

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ They scream, cry or shout in their sleep. | ☐ Evenings include news or arguments. |
| ☐ They wake up frightened and confused. | ☐ It started after a new medication. |
| ☐ Bad dreams happen several times a week. | ☐ They talk about scary events from the past. |

Checked 2 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Tonight, then tomorrow

1

Wake them gently by voice and say 'It was a dream. You're safe.'

Comfort first, facts later.

TONIGHT

2

Turn on a soft light and offer water or a hug.

Stay until they calm.

TONIGHT

3

Keep the last hour before bed calm: no news, soft music.

What goes in before sleep shows up in dreams.

TOMORROW

4

Tell the doctor if nightmares are frequent or new.

Medications or past trauma may play a role.

TOMORROW

TONIGHT = what to do in the moment • TOMORROW = how to prevent it

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

19 Nightmares and Waking Up Scared

continued

3 WHAT TO SAY Soft, simple words for the evening and night

say
this

"You're safe with me."

"Let's sit together for a bit."

"Here's some water."

+ TRACK IT IN YOUR SLEEP DIARY

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Time of the nightmare. | ☐ Evening activities. |
| ☐ What they said about it. | ☐ New medications. |

4 FOLLOW UP

CHECK AGAIN IN 2 WEEKS

Are nightmares less frequent since the evening routine changed?

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

Nightmares are frequent, very distressing, or started after a new medication.

Dr. Vera's tip

Keep a calm photo album by the bed. After a bad dream, looking at happy faces helps them settle.

20

Acting Out Dreams: Kicking or Punching in Sleep

DO THIS NOW

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Talking, shouting, kicking, punching or falling out of bed while asleep.

WHY IT HAPPENS

This can be REM sleep behavior disorder, which is common in Lewy body and Parkinson's-related dementias.

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like your nights?

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ They kick, punch or thrash while asleep. | ☐ You've been hit in bed. |
| ☐ They talk or shout during dreams. | ☐ They have Parkinson's or Lewy body dementia. |
| ☐ They've fallen out of bed. | ☐ They don't remember it in the morning. |

Checked 2 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Tonight, then tomorrow

1

Wake them by voice from a safe distance, not by touch.

Touch can be pulled into the dream.

TONIGHT

2

Move sharp or hard objects away from the bed.

Protect them from injury.

TONIGHT

3

Record an episode and show the doctor.

It may be REM sleep behavior disorder, which is treatable.

TOMORROW

4

Lower the bed and pad the area; consider separate beds.

Keep you both safe.

TOMORROW

TONIGHT = what to do in the moment • TOMORROW = how to prevent it

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

20

Acting Out Dreams: Kicking or Punching in Sleep

continued

3

WHAT TO SAY Soft, simple words for the evening and night

say
this

"You're safe. It's just a dream."

"I'm here. Let's rest."

Say their name gently from a distance.

+

TRACK IT IN YOUR SLEEP DIARY

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Time and what happened. | ☐ Video recorded (yes/no). |
| ☐ Any injuries. | ☐ Medications. |

4

FOLLOW UP

CHECK AGAIN AFTER THE DOCTOR VISIT

Keep the diary going after treatment starts to see if episodes decrease.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

You see kicking, punching or falling out of bed during sleep. Ask about REM sleep behavior disorder.

Dr. Vera's tip

A phone video of one episode is worth a thousand words at the doctor's office.

21

Seeing Things in the Dark

DO THIS NOW

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Seeing people, animals or bugs in the bedroom at night; fear of 'someone in the room.'

WHY IT HAPPENS

Poor light, shadows, reflections, vision problems, infections and some medications can cause it.

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like your nights?

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ They see people, animals or bugs at night. | ☐ Mirrors or dark windows face the bed. |
| ☐ They say someone is in the room. | ☐ Their glasses or hearing aids aren't used. |
| ☐ Coats hang on the bedroom door. | ☐ It's new or getting worse. |

Checked 2 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Tonight, then tomorrow

1

Say 'I don't see it, but I believe you. I'll keep you safe.'

Their fear is real.

TONIGHT

2

Turn on a lamp and look for shadows or reflections.

Often the 'stranger' is a coat or a shadow.

TONIGHT

3

Lie in their bed at night and look around; fix what you see.

Cover mirrors, move coats, add steady light.

TOMORROW

4

Tell the doctor about new hallucinations.

Check for infection and medication effects.

TOMORROW

TONIGHT = what to do in the moment • TOMORROW = how to prevent it

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

21 Seeing Things in the Dark

continued

3 WHAT TO SAY Soft, simple words for the evening and night

say
this

"Let's turn on the light together."

"I'll make sure it's gone."

"Come sit with me in the kitchen."

+ TRACK IT IN YOUR SLEEP DIARY

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ What they saw and when. | ☐ Whether a change helped. |
| ☐ Lighting in the room. | ☐ Any new medications or illness. |

4 FOLLOW UP

CHECK AGAIN IN 1 WEEK

If hallucinations continue or cause distress, call the doctor. Don't use sedatives without advice.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

Hallucinations are new or getting worse. Check for infection and medication effects. Some dementias react badly to certain medications.

Dr. Vera's tip

Lie in their bed at night and look around. You'll often spot the 'stranger' in a coat or a shadow.

part five

Protect Your Sleep



Medications, supplements, and the most overlooked problem of all: your own exhaustion.

In this part

22	Sleeping Pills and "PM" Medications	p. 60
23	Melatonin and Natural Sleep Aids	p. 62
24	Getting Your Own Sleep	p. 64
25	Getting Overnight Help	p. 66

Remember the 24-hour reset

Morning light • **Midday** movement • **Afternoon** calm • **Evening** wind-down

22

Sleeping Pills and "PM" Medications

DO THIS NOW

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Using over-the-counter sleep aids, 'PM' pain relievers or old prescriptions to help them sleep.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Many sleep aids contain diphenhydramine or similar ingredients that can worsen confusion and cause falls.

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like your nights?

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ You've used an over-the-counter sleep aid. | ☐ Someone suggested 'something to knock them out.' |
| ☐ Labels say 'PM' or 'diphenhydramine.' | ☐ They drink alcohol with medications. |
| ☐ They're more confused or unsteady since a sleep pill. | ☐ No one has reviewed their sleep medicines. |

Checked 2 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Tonight, then tomorrow

1

Don't give a new sleep aid tonight without asking the doctor or pharmacist.

Many sleep aids worsen confusion and falls.

TONIGHT

2

Use calm, dark and quiet instead.

Non-drug steps are safer.

TONIGHT

3

Book a medication review focused on sleep.

Ask 'What's the safest option?'

TOMORROW

4

Read every label for 'PM' and 'may cause drowsiness.'

Remove risky products from the house.

TOMORROW

TONIGHT = what to do in the moment • **TOMORROW** = how to prevent it

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

22 Sleeping Pills and "PM" Medications

continued

3 WHAT TO SAY Soft, simple words for the evening and night

say
this

"What are the side effects of this?"

"Could any current medications be causing the sleep problem?"

"Is there a non-drug option we should try first?"

+ TRACK IT IN YOUR SLEEP DIARY

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Any sleep medicine given (name, time). | ☐ Falls. |
| ☐ Next-day confusion or dizziness. | ☐ Sleep quality. |

4 FOLLOW UP

CHECK AGAIN AFTER ANY MEDICATION CHANGE

Watch closely for one week for confusion, dizziness or falls.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

They're more confused, dizzy or falling after a new sleep medicine.

Dr. Vera's tip

Read labels for 'PM' and 'diphenhydramine.' If you see them, ask the pharmacist before giving it.

23

Melatonin and Natural Sleep Aids

DO THIS MONTH

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Trying melatonin, herbal teas, CBD or supplements to improve sleep.

WHY IT HAPPENS

'Natural' products can still interact with medications, and results for dementia sleep are mixed.

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like your nights?

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ You're considering melatonin or a supplement. | ☐ Doses aren't consistent. |
| ☐ You've tried several products at once. | ☐ You're not sure if it's helping. |
| ☐ No one has told the doctor about supplements. | ☐ They seem groggy in the morning. |

Checked 2 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Tonight, then tomorrow

1

Don't add a new supplement tonight without checking.

Supplements can interact with medicines.

TONIGHT

2

Use a calming ritual instead: warm drink, soft music.

The ritual itself helps.

TONIGHT

3

Ask the doctor or pharmacist about safety and dose.

Get a clear yes or no.

TOMORROW

4

Change only one thing at a time for two weeks.

Then you'll know what actually helped.

TOMORROW

TONIGHT = what to do in the moment • TOMORROW = how to prevent it

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

23

Melatonin and Natural Sleep Aids

continued

3

WHAT TO SAY Soft, simple words for the evening and night

say
this

"What dose would you suggest, if any?"

"How long should we try it?"

"What side effects should I watch for?"

+

TRACK IT IN YOUR SLEEP DIARY

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Supplement name, dose and time. | ☐ Morning grogginess. |
| ☐ Time asleep. | ☐ Any side effects. |

4

FOLLOW UP

CHECK AGAIN IN 2 WEEKS

Compare two weeks with and without the supplement. Keep it only if it clearly helps.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

They seem more confused or drowsy during the day after starting a supplement.

Dr. Vera's tip

Change only one thing at a time for two weeks. Otherwise you'll never know what actually helped.

24

Getting Your Own Sleep

DO THIS NOW

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

You're up several times a night, exhausted, irritable and running on empty.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Caregivers of people with night waking are chronically sleep-deprived, which harms health and patience.

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like your nights?

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ You're up several times a night. | ☐ You've nodded off while driving. |
| ☐ You haven't had a full night's sleep in weeks. | ☐ You sleep in a chair by their bed. |
| ☐ You're irritable or forgetful. | ☐ No one else takes night duty. |

Checked 2 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Tonight, then tomorrow

1

If you can, nap when they nap.

Rest is part of the job.

TONIGHT

2

Use a baby monitor and sleep in your own bed.

You'll hear them and rest better.

TONIGHT

3

Ask a family member to take one night a week.

One full night can reset your week.

TOMORROW

4

Tell your own doctor you're not sleeping.

You deserve help too.

TOMORROW

TONIGHT = what to do in the moment • TOMORROW = how to prevent it

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

24 Getting Your Own Sleep

continued

3 WHAT TO SAY Soft, simple words for the evening and night

say
this

To family: "Can you take Tuesday nights?"

To yourself: "Rest is part of good care."

To the doctor: "I'm not sleeping. I need help too."

+ TRACK IT IN YOUR SLEEP DIARY

☐ Hours you slept.

☐ Naps you took.

☐ Times you were woken.

☐ How you felt the next day.

4 FOLLOW UP

CHECK AGAIN IN 2 WEEKS

Look at your own sleep hours. If you're still exhausted, it's time for overnight help.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

You're falling asleep while driving, making mistakes, or feel hopeless. Talk to your doctor. If you're in crisis, call or text 988.

Dr. Vera's tip

Trade one night a week with a family member. One full night of sleep can reset your whole week.

25

Getting Overnight Help

DO THIS MONTH

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

No one to cover nights; you haven't had a full night's sleep in weeks or months.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Many families don't know about overnight respite, in-home help or programs that pay for it.

1 QUICK CHECK Does this sound like your nights?

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ No one else can cover nights. | ☐ You're worried about cost. |
| ☐ You haven't had a break in months. | ☐ You feel guilty asking for help. |
| ☐ You don't know what respite is available. | ☐ You're close to your limit. |

Checked 2 or more? Start the action plan below.

2 ACTION PLAN Tonight, then tomorrow

1

Write down your loved one's bedtime routine on one page.

Any helper can follow it.

TONIGHT

2

Call the Eldercare Locator at 1-800-677-1116 tomorrow.

Find local respite programs.

TOMORROW

3

Ask about respite through GUIDE, Medicaid waivers and VA programs.

Some programs help pay.

TOMORROW

4

Try one overnight shift to start.

Introduce the helper during the day first.

TOMORROW

TONIGHT = what to do in the moment • TOMORROW = how to prevent it

What to say and follow-up on the next page →

25 Getting Overnight Help

continued

3 WHAT TO SAY Soft, simple words for the evening and night

say
this

"Do you offer overnight or weekend respite?"

"What does it cost, and is there help paying?"

"Can the same caregiver come each time?"

+ TRACK IT IN YOUR SLEEP DIARY

☐ Nights covered by others.

☐ Your sleep on those nights.

☐ How your loved one did.

☐ What to change next time.

4 FOLLOW UP

CHECK AGAIN IN 1 MONTH

Is overnight help happening regularly? If not, call the Area Agency on Aging again.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

You can't safely continue without help. Talk to the doctor about care options.

Dr. Vera's tip

Write your loved one's bedtime routine on one page. It makes any helper as good as you on night one.

[illegible]

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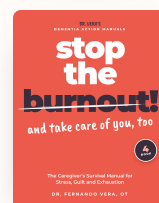
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about the author

Dr. Fernando Vera, OT



Dr. Fernando Vera is a licensed occupational therapist and the owner and clinical director of Empower Health, a clinic specializing in dementia care. He and his team help families find support, reduce caregiver burnout and unlock benefits most never discover, including enrollment in Medicare's GUIDE Program for people living with dementia.

His work is personal. His mother, Virginia, was healthy and active when she was diagnosed with Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, a rapidly progressing form of dementia. Caring for her taught him what no textbook could: caregivers need clear, practical answers they can use in the moment.

He is also the creator of the Dementia Behavior Coach app, The Activity Idea Book and The Sundown Plan.

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