



Sleep and Dementia:
**A report on the
evidence-base for non-
pharmacological sleep
interventions for person
with dementia**
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Summary

Expanded Background: Disordered sleep¹, prevalent in older persons (1), has been shown to have significant cognitive, physical and psychological consequences (2). For example, the rate of falls in older persons with disordered sleep is demonstrated to be higher (3). The literature shows that falls, and fear of falling, have a negative impact on older persons' self-confidence, and continued engagement in social activities. These activities are important because they provide the physical and social stimulation necessary to maintain cognitive and emotional health (4, 5). British researchers found that disordered sleep was a strong predictor of future depression in older community dwelling adults (6). In turn, depression is one of the risk factors for dementia (7). Disordered sleep patterns in persons with dementia have been found to accelerate functional decline and contribute to increased caregiver stress (8). Caregiver support and wellbeing is critical for successful management of dementia in the home setting. However, living with someone who has dementia and disordered sleep results in sleep deprivation in the caregiver as well, further decreasing caregiver resilience and coping.

Researchers found a relationship between sleep deprivation of as little duration as three weeks and accelerated development of amyloid plaques (which contribute to Alzheimer's disease) in the brains of lab mice (9). Other studies reveal a clear link between insomnia and cognitive tasks such as vigilance (10), concentration, memory, and executive function (1, 11). Cricco et al (12) concluded from a study involving more than 6,400 persons over age 65 living in the community that 'chronic insomnia independently predicts incident of increased cognitive decline in older men'(pg.1186).

We also know from the literature that older persons with disordered sleep are at increased risk of substance misuse as they attempt to self-medicate for their sleep problems. This behaviour can contribute to more rapid onset of dementia and decreased functioning. Both intentional and unintentional substance misuse (illicit, prescription and over the counter medication) has been linked to cognitive decline in older persons [30]. And, while moderate alcohol consumption may delay onset of dementia, chronic alcohol abuse can be a significant risk factor in some forms of dementia (13). Culbertson (14) suggests that the rate of misuse of prescription medication in isolated, elderly women with insomnia in the US maybe as high as 11%. Other researchers point out the complexity of the bidirectional nature of substance misuse to self-medicate for

¹ ** *Disordered sleep* for the purposes of this project denotes the range of sleep problems – hypersomnia (including sleep apnea and narcolepsy), parasomnia (including confusional arousal, night terrors, rest-less leg syndrome, sleep walking), insomnia (difficulty falling and/or staying asleep) and sleep-wake cycle disturbances- which share the common outcome of perceived and/or physiological non-restorative sleep. Disordered sleep can be consequent to environmental, social, and psychological features in addition to biological influences. Additionally, disordered sleep can be problematic for other family members and caregivers.

disordered sleep (15, 16). They highlight that using substances like alcohol and cough medications to help fall asleep have the side effect of actually reducing restorative sleep. This sets up a cycle of substance misuse to promote sleep, leading to poor sleep, leading to more substance misuse and so on. Aria et al (17) found that of the 699 elderly persons studied in Finland, 26% used alcohol to routinely self-medicate for sleep problems. Self-medication does not seem to decrease with age as evidenced by Johnson's (18) finding that the majority of community living women over the age of 85 they studied self-medicated with alcohol and/or over-the-counter medication on a regular basis to improve their sleep.

A subgroup of older persons at particular risk of both poorly managed dementia and disordered sleep are the estimated 18,000 yearly immigrants to Canada. As parents and grandparents they have immigrated not for employment opportunities but to be reunited with their adult children (19). Many of these older persons, often women, take up residence in their adult children's established households. In their new homes they can lead lives isolated from the community and in which the risk factors for dementia (like disordered sleep, depression, poor nutrition and limited social stimulation and physical activity) go largely unrecognized. These older persons are often isolated by language and limited mobility from the resources in their new community that they need to deal with this complex array of inter-related risks to cognitive, emotional and physical wellbeing (20).

We see then that there is a problem of older persons, particularly women, being at risk for cognitive, emotional and substance misuse problems in relation to disordered sleep that match and accentuate the risk factors for dementia. Assuming that some elements of the relationship between dementia and disordered sleep are bi-directional and that disordered sleep is a modifiable risk factor for dementia, further research in this under examined area is important. Currently barriers and lack of awareness amongst the clinical community regarding sleep interventions for persons with dementia and their caregivers exist. For example, although non-pharmacological interventions have been demonstrated to be effective for improving restorative sleep in older persons (21, 22) there remains a prevalent belief that decreased ability to sleep is a 'normal' part of aging (23). As a result, people do not recognize sleep problems can be treated and do not seek help. Additionally, societal ageism, older adults' denial of sleep problems, coexisting disabilities related to alcohol misuse (13), depression, isolation, and poor healthcare provider awareness (24), all contribute to the under-diagnosis and treatment of disordered sleep in older persons in general, and specifically, in those persons with dementia.

Study rationale: Disordered sleep in persons with dementia is a contributing factor for cognitive, emotional and psycho-social dysfunction, risk taking behaviors and a range of other health problems (25, 26). The relationship between disordered sleep and decreased cognitive and physical functioning, substance misuse, and a number of mental health problems is highly relevant to healthcare providers. Research also now suggests that this may be a bi-directional relationship. This exciting proposition means that interventions for

disordered sleep may reduce the risk for, or lessen the severity of, cognitive disorders like dementia, other mental and physical health problems, and facilitate continued independent community living (26) . However, the evidence-base for non-pharmacological sleep interventions (NPSI) has not yet been evaluated, synthesized, and clearly presented in the literature. As such, healthcare providers lack the information required to guide practice.

Objective: To evaluate the methodological quality of evidence for NPSIs to improve restorative sleep in persons with dementia.

Approach: A Critical Review of published NPSI research was undertaken in August 2010. The systematic search retrieved twenty-nine studies were retrieved consisting of 14 non-light and 15 light-based interventions which were evaluated for methodological quality.

Findings: The quality of evidence ranged from strong and conclusive to weak and in need of further research. The evidence for non-light based interventions in particular was sparse and of lower methodological quality. The attached tables present a summary of clinically relevant findings and recommendations for family members to help improve sleep for persons with dementia.

Conclusions: Currently there is a paucity of methodologically rigorous research in the area of non-pharmacological sleep interventions for persons with dementia. While the literature clearly identifies the magnitude and clinical, functional, and economic significance of the issue for persons with dementia, their caregivers and society in general, most evidence about effective, pragmatic interventions is anecdotal and untested. The small body of research that exists shows much promise and serves to highlight emerging and extensive opportunities for study. We need to couple tacit knowledge about effective interventions derived from clinicians' and family members' experience with rigorous scientific inquiry so as to build a strong evidence-base for the high need and growing area of non-pharmacological sleep interventions for persons with dementia.

Table 1:

Clinically relevant evidence for non-pharmacological sleep interventions for persons with dementia

Conclusive Evidence	Inconclusive Evidence	Insufficient Evidence
Bright Light Interventions		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Multi-dimensional intervention including bright light exposure (27) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Morning Bright Light therapy (28-33) ▪ Bright light and melatonin (34, 35) ▪ High intensity ambient lighting (34-36) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Social interaction in combination with bright light therapy (37) ▪ Lunchtime Bright Light therapy(38) ▪ Dawn Dusk Simulation (39) ▪ Prolonged exposure to ambient blue high-intensity light (40)
Non-Light Interventions		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Individualized (social) activities (41, 42) ▪ Respite Care (negative outcome for person with dementia and positive outcome for caregiver) (43) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sleep Hygiene and education (44-46) ▪ Passive Body Heating (47) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Music (48) ▪ Exercise program (49) ▪ Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS) (50) ▪ Therapeutic biking (51) ▪ Outdoor Activity program (52) ▪ Indoor gardening (53) Environmental modification (54)

Table 2: Recommendations for family members to help someone with dementia have a better sleep

There is good evidence that these interventions help someone with dementia to have better sleep

Exposure to bright light

During the daytime people should be exposed to as much bright light as possible. The best source of bright light is natural daylight but there are also special lamps that are sold in pharmacies.

How does it work?

Bright light is registered by the eyes and signals the brain to produce hormones and other chemicals that help us stay awake and alert in the daytime. When light is dim the brain interprets this message as a signal that it is time to sleep. When this happens the body produces hormones and chemicals that make us drowsy and not thinking as clearly as possible.

When should it be used?

People should be exposed to bright light during the daytime. After the evening meal lights should be dimmer so the body is signalled to produce hormones and chemicals to help people go to sleep.

When should it not be used?

Avoid bright lights at night-time in the bedroom. This includes televisions, LED alarm clocks and light coming from streetlights outside. These light sources will signal the body to wake up. A restful sleep requires the room to be as dark as possible.

Increased daytime activity

Avoiding naps in the daytime helps make sure that people are tired and can sleep at night-time.

How does it work?

Daytime activity helps the body's digestive and elimination functions so that night-time sleep is undisturbed. Pleasurable social activities also increase the body's production of hormones and chemicals that improve mood, decrease anxiety, and promote relaxation. These all contribute to better sleep at night.

When should it be used?

Activity and socializing should occur spread across the day to avoid over-tiring and the tendency to nap. Try to avoid physical activity or stimulating social activities within two hours of bedtime- the body needs time to relax and naturally become tired.

When should activity not be used?

Avoid activity too close to bedtime – it is better to spread light activity across the day rather than having one period of high effort that is so tiring that a nap in the daytime will be needed.

There is some evidence that these interventions help someone with dementia to have better sleep

Sleep hygiene

Sleep hygiene means establishing good habits and a bedroom setting that promote sleep.

These habits include:

- Having a fixed bedtime and an awakening time that are the same everyday.
- Having certain activities that are always associated with going to bed (for example a certain piece of music, having a light snack of a the same 'bedtime' food each night , or putting on a specific hand lotion reserved for bedtime) all help people recognize that it is time for sleep.
- Avoiding napping during the day.
- Avoiding alcohol 4-6 hours before bedtime.
- Having lots of fluids during the day – hydration is important. A few hours before bed is early enough to cut back to prevent needing to get up in the

Passive body heat

A warm bath or sitting under a warm blanket for ½ hour before going to bed can help raise the body's temperature.

How does it work?

When we sleep our body temperature drops slightly. Being too warm keeps us from going to sleep. If you raise a person's body temperature slightly for a short period of time while he is awake, as he cool off he will feel more sleepy. That's why a warm bath before bed helps us sleep- the bath raises our body temperature for a short period and as we cool

night.

- Avoid caffeine 4-6 hours before bedtime.
- Avoiding heavy, spicy, or sugary foods 4-6 hours before bedtime. A light snack (a plain cookie, a few grapes or ½ a banana) is fine and often helps people settle to sleep.
- Being active in the daytime, but not right before bed.

For a good sleep setting:

- Check that the bed is comfortable.
- Set the overnight temperature a bit cool and keep the room well ventilated.
- Block out all distracting noise (running a fan helps create neural background sound to block out disturbing noises).
- Make sure the bedroom is as dark as possible- no TV, hallway light, or street lights coming through the window. All of these will send messages to the brain that it is time to be awake.

off after the bath we feel sleepy.

When should it be used?

Warm baths or warm blankets within an hour of going to bed help. If your family member does not like to take a bath at night- try using a warm electric blanket around his shoulders or in his lap for about 20 minutes before bed instead. Remember the warmth should be comfortable, not hot and unpleasant.

There has been only a little research about these sleep interventions for someone with dementia but they are promising and need more study

Dawn-Dusk Simulation

This means adjusting the lighting in a home to simulate regular daytime and night as much as possible. Pharmacies sell alarm clocks that use a gradual increase in light to wake people up instead of a loud alarm. The light increased gently just like the daylight as the sun comes up. Other lighting is available to mimic bright daylight during the day. In the evening lights should gradually be dimmed – again to mimic the sun going down.

How does this work?

Our bodies receive messages from light that triggers the brain to produce chemicals and hormones to either keep us awake or help us sleep. When we live inside a lot, out of direct light and using artificial light, or body clocks (also known as "circadian rhythm" can get disrupted.

When should you use Dawn-Dusk simulation?

When ever your family member with dementia is not receiving enough natural daylight to maintain proper circadian rhythm. This occurs most often in winter and when living in institutions with lots of artificial light instead of direct sunlight.

Other promising sleep interventions that need more study

- Music to promote sleep
- Exposure to high intensity blue-light (produced by special LED lights)
- Exposure to high intensity light particularly at noon time
- Indoor gardening
- Specific types of exercise programs
- The use of monitoring devices to alert caregivers to nighttime wandering
- Decreasing stimulation and potential wandering in the sleeping environment by keeping the bedroom door close at night

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