

# Helping people with dementia catch some ZZZ's

August 29 2011, By Laurie Wang

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Sometimes counting sheep just doesn't work. Sleep deprivation is a common problem for everyone, no matter what their age, but for those suffering dementia, healthy sleep is critical and untreated sleep problems are one of the most frequent factors contributing to institutionalization.

To help dementia sufferers learn everything there is to know about sleep, University of Alberta Faculty of Rehabilitation Medicine researcher Cary Brown has launched [a first-of-its-kind website](#) that brings together the best and proven resources on sleep.

"Sleep is a critical but overlooked aspect of dementia management," said the associate professor in the Department of Occupational Therapy. "As many as 40 to 70 per cent of people with dementia will also have sleep disorders. I wanted to raise awareness on the topic and give health-care providers and the general public resources and knowledge."

Sleep disorders interfere with memory, problem-solving and overall daily function. Sleep problems not only interfere with risk of fall and fractures, but also contribute to depression, irritability and aggression.

"Family caregivers of people with dementia can also become sleep deprived and in turn, their health also suffers."

Brown's website focuses on knowledge transfer and getting the information out to people who need it. Research is clear; the most important ways to help someone with dementia sleep better are to:

- Make sure the bedroom is as dark as possible—no TV, hallway light, or street lights coming through the window. Light sends messages to the brain that it is time to be awake.
- 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).

“Non-pharmacological strategies for better sleep are important,” said Brown. “Research has found taking medication to help sleep increases the risk of falling because of daytime grogginess. We need to condition ourselves to get healthy sleep.”

Brown’s website has many research-based resources and [sleep](#) tips for people with [dementia](#), their family and their caregivers. To visit the site, [click here](#).

Provided by University of Alberta

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