



Time Change Survival Guide for Dementia Caregivers

Along with falling leaves, cooler temperatures, and the holidays on the horizon, comes one more tell-tale sign of the changing seasons: the (often-dreaded) time change that forces us to “fall back” an hour. While feeling like you’re ready to turn in at 7:00 p.m. and watching the evening news in the dark aren’t highly ranked on most folks’ lists, there are more serious potential impacts for people with dementia and those living with and caring for them.

“Falling back” an hour can disrupt the already fragile internal clocks of people with Alzheimer’s and other dementias, potentially worsening late-day confusion, sundowning and sleep problems.

In other words, if everyone in your house seems a little out of sorts for a few days, you’re not imagining it—and you’re certainly not alone.

We’ve put together some tips to help you and your loved one make it through fall and winter and emerge as comfortably as possible on the other side.

Plan ahead for the time change

Instead of moving the clock back one hour all at once, adjust the time by 10 or 15 minutes each day in the days leading up to the time change on Sunday, Nov. 1.

This can give your loved one’s internal clock a little more time to adjust to the change.

Maintain routines

As you adjust the clocks, make sure to adjust routine activities as well. This includes meal times, medication schedules and bedtime.

Keeping familiar routines as consistent as possible can provide helpful structure when everything else may feel a little out of sync.

Adjust lighting

Turning on indoor lights before the sun goes down can help ease the transition to earlier darkness and reduce indoor shadows, which can sometimes cause anxiety or confusion.

Make time each day to get outside

Getting outside in the sunlight each day helps regulate our natural circadian rhythm, which plays a big role in regulating our internal clocks and sleep-wake cycles.

Plan time to take a walk or simply sit on a porch or patio. Even on cloudy days, getting outside can be beneficial.

Encourage light exercise

Regular physical activity not only supports cognitive function, but can also promote better sleep and reduce agitation and restlessness.

Create calm spaces

Another way to help ease anxiety that may accompany the time change is by creating a peaceful, comfortable environment.

Try playing soft music, setting up a cozy space with enough light, keeping comforting items within easy reach, and make sure the temperature is comfortable.

The National Institute on Aging also suggests sticking to a schedule, avoiding alcohol and caffeine, and discouraging naps or dozing off in the afternoon.

And don't forget about you!

As a caregiver, don't forget that the time change affects you, too.

During that week, give yourself some grace and try to "lower the bar." This is not the week to try to get everything on your to-do list done. Avoid complicated outings and tackling extra errands. Remember: **good enough is good enough!**

Give yourself permission to rest and do something just for you, even if it's something little. A short phone call with a good friend, sitting outside and listening to the birds for 20 minutes, or reading for a few minutes can be restorative.

And finally, remember that you are not alone. If you need help making a plan or navigating changes in behavior, **Respite Care Charleston is here for you.** We're committed to helping you and your loved ones have **MORE.GOOD.DAYS.** Reach us at info@RespiteCareCharleston.org or call us at (843) 647-7405.