

The Sundowning Night Plan

For senior dogs with dementia who get restless, anxious, or confused after dark. Set up before dusk; repeat every night. Predictability helps. From the veterinary guide at drfossoms.com/dog-dementia/sundowning/

Tonight, in order

- Lamps on before dusk, not after dark.** Keep a low, steady nightlight where your dog sleeps - darkness plus fading vision is disorienting.
- Same bedtime, same wind-down, same sleeping spot.** A confused brain finds routine calming; change nothing you do not have to.
- Make the sleep space safe and cozy.** A confined, hazard-free area away from stairs; an orthopedic bed if joints are stiff. Many dogs settle better enclosed.
- Last potty trip late.** A comfortable bladder is one less reason to wake.
- Keep the evening calm.** Dim the noise and traffic in the house as bedtime approaches.
- Calming aids, if your vet agrees.** White noise or calm music, a worn shirt that smells like you, pheromone diffusers - gentle helps that stack.

During the day (where nights are won)

- Sunlight in the morning** - real daylight helps reset the body clock.
- Gentle play and short walks** - a genuinely tired dog sleeps better.
- Discourage long late-afternoon naps** - they steal sleep from the night.

If tonight is bad

- Stay calm and boring.** Reassure briefly, guide back to bed; big reactions reward waking.
- Do not punish.** Confusion is not disobedience.
- Note what happened** in the tracker below - patterns help your vet help you.

Three-night tracker (bring this to your vet)

NIGHT	WHAT WE TRIED	SETTLED BY (TIME)	WHAT HAPPENED / NOTES
1			
2			
3			

Go to a veterinarian NOW if you see

Trouble breathing, collapse, or a seizure-like episode · repeated vomiting, or a swollen or painful belly · an inability to urinate · severe pain, sudden weakness, or sudden blindness · **confusion that arrived over hours, not weeks.** Night restlessness itself is rarely an emergency - these signs are.

If nights are suddenly worse, do not assume it is only dementia. Pain, urinary problems, heart or breathing disease, and anxiety can look the same after dark - a vet visit sorts them out, and there are real treatment options when it is cognitive decline.