THE GUIDED LIGHT

Calm Evenings. Connected Care.

LACROSSE COUNTY'S DEMENTIA NEWSLETTER FOR HOPE, SUPPORT, AND RESOURCES

November 2026

Sign up for this newsletter: adrc@lacrossecounty.org

Sleep, Sundowning & Support for the Whole Family



As daylight fades, many people living with dementia or mild cognitive impairment become more restless, confused, or on edge — a pattern often called **sundowning**. It is common, it is not anyone's fault, and it affects more than just the person experiencing it. This issue looks at what is likely happening in the brain and body as day turns to evening, practical ways to ease that transition, and — just as important — caring for the person doing the caregiving and shaping a home that helps everyone rest.

What Might Be Happening

Four things that build together as the day goes on.

Building Fatigue

Mental, physical tiredness adds up over the day, leaving less patience and coping ability by evening.

Fading Light

As natural light dims, longer shadows and low light can create confusion or spark anxiety.

Rhythm Changes

Dementia can disrupt the body's internal clock, blurring the usual line between day and night.

Sensory Overload

A full day of noise, activity, and decisions can leave little left to give as evening arrives.

> *Late-day changes are common and are not anyone's fault — understanding what's behind them is the first step toward easing them.*

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Small Shifts. Steadier Evenings.
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A Calmer Evening, Step by Step

Sundowning usually responds better to changes made earlier in the day than to anything tried once symptoms have started. These habits, drawn from the National Institute on Aging and the Alzheimer's Association, help smooth the whole day toward a calmer evening.

MORNING
Start with Light

Get outside or sit by a window for natural daylight soon after waking, and keep a consistent time to rise each day. Morning light helps anchor the body's internal clock.

AFTERNOON
Stay Active, Not Overloaded

Encourage movement and engagement, but avoid packing in too many activities. Discourage long or late naps — a short rest is fine, but dozing late in the day can push sleep further off track.

LATE AFTERNOON
Lighten the Load

Schedule appointments, errands, and bathing earlier in the day, when alertness is highest. Try a larger midday meal and a lighter dinner, and ease off caffeine, alcohol, and nicotine as the day goes on.

EVENING
Ease the Transition

Turn on bright, home-style lighting before dusk so shadows do not have a chance to form. Lower noise and stimulation — including the television — and offer a calm, familiar activity like music or looking through photographs together.

Spotlight: Track the Pattern

A brief daily note of when restlessness shows up, and what came right before it — a meal, a visitor, a loud TV — often reveals a personal trigger. A trigger that's known is usually easier to head off than a symptom is to soothe once it starts.

"You can't reason someone out of sundowning — but you can often help prevent it."

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Two People, One Household.

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Rest for Two: The Caregiver and the Home

Easing evenings is not only about the person living with dementia. Your own rest, and the home you both live in, shape how the whole day — and night — goes.

Caring for the Caregiver

Supporting someone through restless evenings often means disrupted sleep for you, too. Sleep loss and caregiving are closely linked, and caregivers who sleep less than 7 hours a night face higher risk of health problems down the road.

Watch your own warning signs:

- Exhaustion or feeling constantly overwhelmed
- Increased irritability or impatience
- Feeling isolated or disconnected
- Trouble sleeping even when you have the chance
- Skipping your own health checkups or habits

Protect what rest you can:

- Aim for 7–9 hours when you're able to
- Keep a short wind-down routine of your own
- Ask someone to cover one evening a week
- Consider a caregiver support group

A Home That Supports Sleep

A few environmental changes can reduce confusion and ease the way to bed — the same errorless, cue-based thinking behind Montessori-inspired dementia care.

- **Light the way.** Aim for roughly twice the light older eyes typically need, using warm, home-style fixtures rather than harsh overhead light.
- **Guide with contrast.** A bedside lamp within reach, a nightlight along the path to the bathroom, and bedding that contrasts with the floor all help someone find their way safely after dark.
- **Keep cues simple.** The same bedtime routine, the same objects in the same place, and doors to familiar rooms left open reduce the guesswork.
- **Clear the path.** Secure or remove loose rugs, clear clutter from walkways, and leave a soft light on rather than a fully dark room.

When to Ask for Help

Talk with a healthcare provider if evening restlessness includes hitting or intense aggression, if pain or physical illness seems to be part of the picture, or if your own health, sleep, or mood has noticeably declined. Non-medication strategies come first, but a provider can help rule out underlying causes and discuss options when those strategies aren't enough.

Need Support?

Contact the La Crosse County ADRC for memory screening information, caregiver support resources, dementia education programs, and community services and referrals.

Phone: (608) 785-5700
lacrossecounty.org/adrc

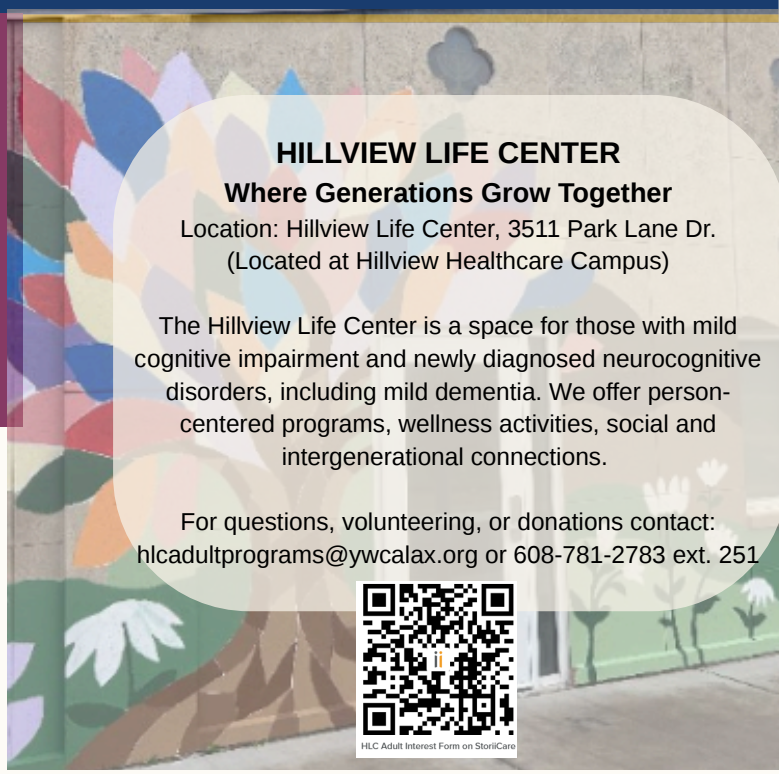
Mark Your Calendar

November · December 2026—Don't Miss These Programs & Events

Gather Together Respite Program

Soft opening on Wednesday, November 4 & December 2, 2026. 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. Beginning January 6, 2027= First & Third Wednesdays

$40 per four-hour session *Scholarships available ADRC Lunch Program available onsite for $5 per meal



HILLVIEW LIFE CENTER

Where Generations Grow Together

Location: Hillview Life Center, 3511 Park Lane Dr.
(Located at Hillview Healthcare Campus)

The Hillview Life Center is a space for those with mild cognitive impairment and newly diagnosed neurocognitive disorders, including mild dementia. We offer person-centered programs, wellness activities, social and intergenerational connections.

For questions, volunteering, or donations contact: hlcadultprograms@ywcalax.org or 608-781-2783 ext. 251

HLC Adult Interest Form on StoriiCare

FREE COMMUNITY FILM SCREENING

TAKING CARE®

A powerful documentary about Alzheimer's, caregiving, hope, and resilience

Monday, November 16

6:30 PM

Marcus La Crosse Cinema
2032 Ward Ave, La Crosse

Free & Open to the Public

Post-Film Discussion with Local Experts

Registration Required

844-227-9304

www.aarp.org/lacrosse

AARP | ADRC | Dementia Friendly Community

Presented by UWL Recreation Therapy

Mindful Connections

A welcoming wellness group for adults experiencing memory changes, brain injury, or other cognitive challenges.

Who	Adults experiencing memory changes, brain injury, or other cognitive challenges; care partners and family members are welcome.
When	Wednesdays, 2:30 PM–3:30 PM; October 21–November 18.
Where	Health Science Center, 1300 Badger Street, La Crosse, WI 54601, Room 2006. Parking passes provided.
How to register	Contact Faith Bussiere at faith.bussiere@uwlax.edu or (608) 785-0823.

Care partners and family members are welcome to attend.

Understanding Alzheimer's and Dementia

Clearwater Farm
760 Green Coulee Road
Onalaska, WI

ALZHEIMER'S ASSOCIATION
Wisconsin Chapter

Wednesday, Nov 18th
1:00-2:00PM

To Register call
Clearwater Farm:
(262) 497-8374