

How Memory Loss in Older Adults Affects Dreaming Patterns

Sleep and memory might seem like entirely different brain processes, but they are more intertwined than you may think. [Sleep plays a pivotal role in memory](#), promoting the consolidation of experiences and ideas, and dreams are a key function of this. Cognitive function and sleep quality also tend to go hand-in-hand, so it goes without saying that older adults with memory loss are likely to experience sleep and dreaming differently than others.

Understanding how older adults with memory loss experience life, including sleep and dreaming, is an important part of providing compassionate memory care. At _____, we provide memory care for seniors across all stages of memory loss progression. Below, we discuss a few of the ways that memory loss may affect the dreaming patterns of our residents.

Seniors With Memory Loss Are Less Likely to Remember Dreams

Unfortunately, the way that seniors with advanced memory loss experience dreams is not well known because they are less likely to remember their dreams. It's difficult enough for those without memory loss to remember everything that they dreamed about after a long and restful sleep, and those with more regressive memory loss do not have the ability to encode a dream into their short-term memory in order to recall it.

Some seniors in the earlier stages of memory loss may still be able to recall their dreams, but they may have trouble understanding that a dream is not part of their memory, as they may not remember waking up from the dream and being able to acknowledge that it was not real. This can lead to feelings of fear and confusion as they are unable to differentiate their dreams and reality.

Dreams Are Associated with Short-Term Memory Consolidation

Although the exact role of dreams is not yet fully understood, it is widely believed that [dreams help us store important memories and things we've learned](#), weed out unimportant memories, and sort through our thoughts and feelings. However, when short-term memory is compromised, the content of dreams tends to shift.

Although there have not been many studies conducted on how sleep is impacted by memory loss, it is widely believed that seniors with advanced memory loss experience their dreams as an incoherent jumble of thoughts and feelings without a cohesive storyline. Most people assign a story to their dreams after waking up and consciously connecting all of the events that occurred in their dreams. This is less likely to occur in older adults with memory loss.

Memory Loss Is Linked With Sleep Disturbances

The [most common sleep disturbances among seniors with memory loss](#) conditions are nightmares. These disturbances are often accompanied by violent movements as they try to act out their nightmares, hitting or yelling in fear. Known as rapid eye movement sleep behavior disorder, this condition is significantly more common in adults with dementia than in the general population.

Older adults with Alzheimer's who take donepezil in the evening are also at a higher risk of experiencing nightmares because the drug activates the visual association cortex during REM sleep, which is the sleep stage associated with dreaming. Although they may not remember exactly what happened in the nightmare, they may still feel a sense of fear and dread from it, leading to feelings of agitation and confusion.

When your loved one has a memory loss condition, seeking memory care from professionals who understand the psychology of memory loss is a key part of improving your loved one's quality of life. If you're exploring memory care communities, we'd love to invite you for a tour of our safe and welcoming assisted living community in Hemet. Contact us today so we can guide you through your options and give you the information you need to make the right decision for your loved one.