

Delirium or "acute confusion"

A guide for caregivers

What is delirium?

It is a medical condition that causes a sudden difficulty in thinking clearly, concentrating or remembering things, especially recent things.

What are the symptoms of delirium?

There are several symptoms:

- agitation;
- mixing up day and night;
- disorientation;
- disorganized thoughts and speech;
- visual or auditory hallucinations;
- inattention;
- mental status fluctuation.

Who can get it?

Anyone!

It happens more often in older adults especially after an operation, when severely ill, when they have an infection or are in an unfamiliar environment.

Is it dementia?

Dementia and delirium are two different conditions. Some people can have both dementia and delirium. People who have dementia seem to get delirium more easily, especially when they are unwell.

What causes delirium?

Usually, there are several reasons:

- constipation;
- infection;
- hospitalization;
- medication changes;
- dehydration;
- pain;
- change in environment or routine
- surgery;
- withdrawal of nicotine, alcohol or other drugs.

How is delirium treated?

The treatment differs according to the causes of the delirium.

Will it go away?

The symptoms usually go away in a few days to a few weeks.

It may take more time for symptoms to go away for older adults.

Some memory problems may not go away.

If so, please advise your doctor or medical team.

How can I help?

- Share with your nurse or doctor any changes you've noticed in your relative since the delirium.
- Visit and reassure the person regularly.
- Make sure glasses and hearing aids are available and worn.
- Offer water and food if allowed.
- Read to them.
- Hold their hand.
- Remind the person where they are.
- Bring in familiar objects from home, such as pictures, blankets ...
- Join them for meals and encourage meals to be taken in a chair.
- Take them for short walks if permitted by staff.



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