

Delirium

Information for residents, families and carers



Delirium causes sudden confusion and changes to your thinking.

It is not normal and can usually be prevented.

Delirium is serious. It can cause you to fall, get pressure sores and lose weight.

Delirium is not dementia or depression, but it has similar symptoms.

If treated early, delirium usually only lasts a few days (but it can last for weeks).

Signs you may have delirium

- Being suddenly confused (or more confused than normal).
- Being unable to pay attention or concentrate.
- Being scared, upset or angry for no reason.
- Saying things that don't make sense.
- Seeing or hearing things that aren't there.
- Being less active or more active than normal.
- Not knowing what time or day it is.
- Not talking to people.
- Having sleep changes.
- Signs of delirium may come and go.

Delirium can be caused by

- Being sick or having an infection.
- Being constipated.
- Being dehydrated.
- Taking a lot of medicines.
- Having bad pain.
- Having a tube for your urine (catheter).
- Recent surgery.

You may be more at risk of delirium if you have had delirium before, or if you have dementia or depression.

Ways to manage delirium

- Your family and friends should let staff know straight away if they notice any signs of delirium.
- The doctor and staff will assess you to find out the cause of the delirium and plan treatment.
- Staff and family should spend time with you.
 - They can remind you of the time and day and help to keep you safe.
 - They can help you eat and drink enough to stay well.
- It helps to:
 - have familiar objects in your room
 - have a calm and quiet room
 - wear your glasses and hearing aids all the time so you can see and hear what is going on around you
 - keep the curtains open during the day. Staying awake when it is light helps you sleep at night.

Working together

You and your family are important members of the care team. You know what is normal for you.

If you have delirium, your family or friends may be the first to notice any changes in your health or behaviour and can let staff know about their concerns. Don't wait to see if things get better – it's always best to get help early.

Working together with staff can help to keep you healthy and out of hospital. Talk to staff and ask questions. They need your help to give you the best care.

Questions to ask staff:

- Is this confusion caused by delirium? What is the cause of the delirium?
- What treatment is needed?
- Could medicines be causing delirium?



Want to know more?

'Delirium' fact sheet <www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au>

Disclaimer: This health information is for general purposes only. Please consult with your doctor or other health professional to make sure this information is right for you.

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