



Therapeutic Activity:

- Have a family member or friend stay with the patient as much as possible - take shifts if you have a large family
- Play soothing music that the patient enjoys
- Bring in familiar objects from home such as pictures and blankets
- Bring in word puzzles, magazines, and newspapers

Other ways that you can help:

- Be patient, do not argue
- Be calm and reassuring
- Make sure the patient gets to the bathroom regularly
- Tell a member of the healthcare team if you notice any symptoms of delirium - family members are often the first to notice changes
- Notify the healthcare team if your family member has experienced a delirium in the past

Important things to remember

- Delirium is common and usually temporary
- Symptoms can come and go, often increase at night and can take days or weeks to resolve
- Family members and caregivers play an important role in caring for a person with delirium
- Delirium can be a scary experience for you and your loved ones. Talking to a healthcare provider can help you understand what is happening

Delirium

A guide for patients, family members and caregivers



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What is Delirium?

Delirium is a temporary state of confusion. It is important to remember that it is not dementia.

It develops quickly (within hours or days) and can sometimes take weeks to clear.

Unfortunately, some people suffering from delirium do not return to their original state of health.

Delirium is a common, serious, and often preventable problem in hospitalized older adults. Delirium can slow patient recovery and requires immediate treatment.

Who is at risk for delirium?

People who:

- Are 65 or older
- Are dependent on others
- Have problems with vision or hearing
- Are not eating or drinking well
- Take multiple medications
- Have taken narcotics
- Have been under anesthetic
- Have multiple medical conditions
- Have had surgery
- Have an infection
- Use alcohol daily
- Spend time in the Intensive Care Unit
- Have a history of delirium, dementia or depression

Patients with delirium may:

- Be agitated, stressed, or anxious
- Look depressed and withdrawn
- Have difficulty focusing on what is happening around them
- Be confused about daily events, daily routines, and who people are
- Say things that do not make sense
- Experience changes in personality or behavior
- See or hear things that are not really there
- Think that people are trying to harm them
- Be up all night and can sleep all day
- Have symptoms that can come and go over the course of a day

How can I help a loved one who is delirious?



Orientation:

- Bring in a calendar for longer stays in the hospital and update daily
- Talk about current events and what is going on around them
- Include date, time and place in conversation



Hearing and Vision Support:

- Make sure glasses are clean and fit well
- Make sure hearing aids are worn and that batteries are fully charged



Meal Support and Hydration:

- Help with meals and bring favourite snacks (when applicable)
- Provide reminders and encouragement to eat and drink when appropriate
- Ensure dentures are available and used as much as possible, especially when eating



Mobilization:

- Talk with the healthcare team about safe exercise and activities for the patient
- Help the patient with sitting and walking (if approved by the healthcare team), as even a few days in bed can cause muscle weakness
- When out of bed, make sure patient is wearing appropriate footwear or gripped socks (supplied by hospital).



Sleep Health:

- Help maintain a quiet and peaceful setting
- Make sure the lighting is good and appropriate for the time of day
- Try to keep awake during the day to promote good day/nights sleeping cycle
- Offer warm blanket or warm drink