

# What is Delirium?

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Delirium is a temporary state of confusion in which the mind becomes clouded, making it difficult to focus one's attention. Delirium develops quickly over hours or days and may last hours, days or longer. Although they can occur together, delirium is not the same as dementia, which is progressive and nonreversible. Delirium is a common, serious problem for older adult patients and can slow the healing/recovery process, as well as put them at risk for an injury or fall. Delirium requires immediate treatment and is often preventable.

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## People at risk for delirium:

- Are 65 or older
  - Have dementia or depression
  - May not be functionally independent
  - Have impaired vision or hearing
  - Are dehydrated/malnourished
  - Take multiple medications
  - Have multiple medical conditions
  - Have had surgery (post-operative confusion)
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## What are the Symptoms of Delirium?

Symptoms of delirium are different for different people, and may come and go throughout the day.

These may include:

- Difficulty understanding what is happening around them
- Confusion about daily events, routines, and who people are
- Saying things that do not make sense
- Changes in personality
- Seeing or hearing things that are not really there
- Thinking that people are trying to harm them
- Becoming quiet and withdrawn
- Becoming stressed, anxious, or restless
- Changes in sleeping/eating habits
- Slurred/rambling speech

## Caring for a person who is delirious or is at risk for developing delirium:

- Inform the healthcare team immediately if you notice any symptoms of delirium.
- Maintain a quiet and peaceful setting
- Surround him/her with familiar objects
- Ensure adequate lighting (but not too bright)
- Ensure glasses are clean and fit well; hearing aid batteries are fully charged and dentures are in place
- Take measures to prevent a fall by encouraging activity/walking as much as possible.
- Make sure he/she is eating and drinking enough
- Stay with and help orient him/her throughout the day as much as possible
- Speak in a calm and reassuring tone of voice and let the person know where he/she is and why
- When giving instructions, state one simple task at a time
- Massage can be soothing for some patients
- Keep an up-to-date list of all medications and health history