

## What Is Delirium?

Delirium is a sudden onset of confusion or a sudden worsening of confusion in someone living with dementia.

## What Does Delirium Look Like?

People with delirium can act confused and have trouble paying attention.

They may also:

- Be restless and upset
- Have trouble waking up and staying awake
- Not make sense
- See and hear imaginary things
- Mix up days and nights
- More forgetful than usual
- Be disoriented

To learn what different types of delirium may look like, visit our website to check out a few videos.



## EDUCATION AND CONSULTATIVE SERVICES

of UPMC Senior Services

Forbes Tower  
Suite 10055  
3600 Forbes Ave. at Meyran  
Pittsburgh, PA 15213

**Help and Referral Line:** 1-866-430-8742

**Website:** SeniorServices.UPMC.com

**Email:** UPMCSeniorServices@UPMC.edu

Find caregiving videos on a variety of subjects on our website.



UPMC policy prohibits discrimination or harassment on the basis of race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, age, sex, genetics, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, familial status, disability, veteran status, or any other legally protected group status. Further, UPMC will continue to support and promote equal employment opportunity, human dignity, and racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity. This policy applies to admissions, employment, and access to and treatment in UPMC programs and activities. This commitment is made by UPMC in accordance with federal, state, and/or local laws and regulations.

# WHAT IS DELIRIUM AND HOW TO MANAGE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS



## EDUCATION AND CONSULTATIVE SERVICES

of UPMC Senior Services

## Is Delirium Dangerous?

Delirium can result in:

- Longer hospital stays
- More nursing home admissions
- Decreased ability to care for self
- Lowered mental abilities
- Falls and injuries
- Shorter life expectancy

## How Does Someone Get Delirium?

Many things can increase the chance for developing delirium, including:

- Some medications
- An infection
- Not eating or drinking enough
- Poor hearing, poor vision
- Lack of sleep
- Pain
- Bed rest
- Dementia
- Depression
- Surgery

## How Can I Help Someone With Delirium?

Describe a normal day in the person's life, and tell the medical team what seems different about their behavior.

- Inform the medical team about any new medication or recent changes in medications.
- Keep the person actively engaged and mobilized as much as possible.
- Make sure the person is wearing their hearing aids and glasses.
- Help the person to eat and drink.
- Talk about familiar things and do familiar activities.
- Keep the window blinds open and room lights on during the day.
- Request a geriatric specialist.
- Ensure they are helped out of bed and mobilized often.

## Why Is My Loved One Suddenly Confused?

### *An example*

At the hospital, the staff finds a new patient who is unable to answer basic questions about herself. The patient insists she must go to work. After consulting with the patient's family, the staff learn the patient's behavior is abnormal and that she is retired. The staff concludes their patient is experiencing delirium.

## How Long Can Delirium Last?

- Delirium can last from days to weeks, but can even last for months, or a year or more.
- Individuals may experience symptoms that come and go over the course of a day.



## How Can I Prevent Delirium From Happening Again?

- An individual is always at risk for developing delirium again. Seek medical attention early.
- Each time the person is admitted to the hospital, tell the the medical team they have had delirium in the past.
- If you notice any changes in the person's behavior or thinking ability, report it to the the medical team immediately.
- Schedule an appointment with a geriatric specialist.