HOW TO RECOGNIZE AND MANAGE DELIRIUM

INFORMATION FOR OLDER ADULTS, FAMILIES, AND CAREGIVERS

READ THIS PAMPHLET TO LEARN:

• What Delirium is.
• What Causes Delirium.
• How to Treat Delirium.

Sinai Healthy Ageing and Geriatrics
WHAT IS DELIRIUM?
Delirium is a sudden, temporary onset of confusion that causes changes in the way people think and behave.

WHO IS AT RISK?
People are more likely to suffer from delirium if they have:

- Dementia.
- Depression.
- Had Recent Major Surgery, such as Heart or Hip Surgery.
- Had Previous Episodes of Delirium.
- Poor Vision or Hearing.
- Or are 65 Years or Older.

WHAT CAUSES DELIRIUM?
The following factors can contribute to delirium:

- Infections.
- Medication Side Effects.
- Dehydration or Malnutrition.
- Constipation or Diarrhea.
- Poorly Controlled Pain.
- Heavy Alcohol Use or Withdrawal.
- Poor Fitting Hearing Aids or Glasses.
- Being in a New or Unfamiliar Environment.
WHAT CAN DELIRIUM LOOK LIKE?

There are two types of delirium: hyperactive and hypoactive. A person with hypoactive delirium may show some of the following symptoms:

- Move Very Slowly or Not Be Active.
- Not Want to Spend Time with Others.
- Pause When Speaking or Not Speak at All.
- Look Sleepy.
- Not Able to Pay Attention or Follow a Conversation.

A person with hyperactive delirium may show some of the following symptoms:

- Be Worried or Afraid.
- Be Restless.
- Repeat the Same Movements Many Times.
- Experience Hallucinations.
- Experience Delusions.

A person can have symptoms of both hyperactive and hypoactive delirium at once, or can switch from one kind to the other.
### HOW IS DELIRIUM TREATED?

- Delirium is treated by treating the underlying cause, which might include medication. These causes are usually identified by the health care team through a careful assessment and specific investigations.
- In most people delirium can clear in a few days or weeks but in others it may take longer. Some people may not recover completely from an episode of delirium even months later.
- It is easier and quicker to treat delirium when the signs and symptoms of delirium are recognized early, but remember that everyone is different.

### DELIRIUM TIPS FOR CAREGIVERS

You can help your family member or friend who is experiencing delirium by doing the following:

- Inform your family member or friend's doctor or nurse of any changes you notice.
- Make sure your family member or friend has his/her glasses and or hearing aids.
- Keep reminding them of where they are, what the date is and what is happening.
- Ensure there is a clock and calendar visible to your family member or friend.
- Encourage visits from familiar people throughout the day.
- Ensure familiar/favourite objects (photos, music) are close at hand.
• Keep sentences short and simple. Talk about current events or read aloud to them.
• Ask your family member or friend’s health care team about helpful and safe activities that you can do with the person experiencing delirium.
• Give the health care team a complete list the prescription medications and any over the counter medications your family member or friend takes. Include how much they take.
• Soothe your family member or friend with hand holding, a massage, a warm drink, or music. Bring in a night light if their health care team says it will help.
• Speak slowly, but do not raise your voice.
WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION?

VANCOUVER ISLAND HEALTH AUTHORITY

Information about delirium for families and caregivers including preventing and recognising delirium.

[Link to information](www.islandhealth.ca/learn-about-health/seniors/delirium)

ICU DELIRIUM

Information about delirium for patients and families dealing with delirium in ICUs.

[Link to information](www.icudelirium.org/patients.html)

HOW TO RECOGNIZE DELIRIUM [VIDEO]

Video for patients and families dealing with delirium.

[Link to video](www.youtube.com/watch?v=hwz9M2jZi_o)
RELEVANT RESOURCES IN OUR SERIES

ADDITIONAL HEALTH RESOURCES IN OUR SERIES:

- Alcohol and Your Health
- Benzodiazepine Use Among Older Adults
- Calcium, Vitamin D and Bone Health
- General Tips for Memory Problems
- How to Recognize and Manage Delirium
- How to Recognize and Manage Depression
- How to Start the Conversation: Advance Care Planning
- Improving Nutrition as You Age
- Improving Urinary Incontinence
- Living Longer, Living Well: Your Guide to Healthy Ageing
- Managing Caregiver Stress
- Managing Multiple Chronic Health Conditions
- Managing Common Mental Health Conditions
- Managing Constipation
- Managing Sleep in Older Adults
- Preventing Falls at Home
- Recognizing and Managing Hearing Loss
- Recognizing and Managing Anxiety
- Safe Medication Use for Older Adults
- Substitute Decision Makers and Powers of Attorney
- Understanding Your Palliative Care Options

ADDITIONAL COMMUNITY RESOURCES IN OUR SERIES:

- Elder Abuse
- Meals on Wheels
- Housing Options for Older Adults
- Community Transportation Options
- How to Register for Wheel-Trans
- Driving Assessment Services
- Funding for Mobility Aids from the Assistive Devices Program

Visit www.sinaigeriatrics.ca/healtheducation for additional resources for older adults, families and caregivers.
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