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 Health System
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 Heart or Hip Surgery
- Had Previous Episodes of Delirium
- Poor Vision or Problems 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
- Heavy Alcohol Use or Withdrawal
- Poor Fitting Hearing Aids or Glasses
- Being in a New or Unfamiliar Environment
- Changes in salt and water balance in the body
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

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.

HOW IS DELIRIUM TREATED?

- Delirium is treated by treating the underlying cause, which might include medication.
- In most people delirium can clear in a few days or weeks and in others it may take longer.
- 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 by doing the following:

- Inform your family member or friend’s doctor or nurse of any changes you notice in thinking or behaviour.
- 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.
- Share a complete list of your family member or friend’s prescriptions and any over the counter medications they take with the health care team. 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.
FOR MORE INFORMATION

VANCOUVER ISLAND HEALTH AUTHORITY

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

https://www.islandhealth.ca/learn-about-health/seniors/delirium

ICU DELIRIUM

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

www.icudelirium.org/patients.html

HOW TO RECOGNIZE DELIRIUM [VIDEO]

Video for patients and families dealing with delirium.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=hwz9M2jZi_o
RELEVANT RESOURCES IN OUR SERIES

• General Tips for Memory Problems
• Safe Medication Use for Older Adults

ADDITIONAL HEALTH RESOURCES IN OUR SERIES:
• Living Longer, Living Well – Your Guide to Healthy Ageing
• Calcium, Vitamin D and Bone Health
• Preventing Falls at Home
• Managing Constipation
• Improving Urinary Incontinence
• Managing Sleep Problems
• Recognizing and Managing Hearing Loss
• Substitute Decision Makers and Powers of Attorney
• Elder Abuse
• Managing Caregiver Stress

ADDITIONAL COMMUNITY RESOURCES IN OUR SERIES:
• Meals on Wheels
• 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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