

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**

Healthy Ageing
and Geriatrics



UHN

Toronto General
Toronto Western
Princess Margaret
Toronto Rehab
Michener Institute

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 a recent major surgery, such as heart or hip surgery, or health episode, such as a heart attack.
- Had a 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.
- Changes in the salt and water balance in the body.
- Having had a recent surgery.



WHAT CAN DELIRIUM LOOK LIKE?

There are two main 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 identifying and 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 FAMILY 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.
- Give the health care team a complete list of the prescription medications and any over the counter medications your family member or friend takes. Include how much they take.
- 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 to help them stay oriented.
- Encourage visits from familiar people throughout the day.
- Ensure familiar/favourite objects (such as photos) 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.
- 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.

NOTES

WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION?

VANCOUVER ISLAND HEALTH AUTHORITY

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



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 Managing Memory Problems
- Managing Constipation
- Managing Mild Cognitive Impairment, Alzheimer's Disease & Other Dementias

ADDITIONAL HEALTH RESOURCES IN OUR SERIES:

- Advance Care Planning: How to Start the Conversation
- Alcohol and Your Health
- Calcium, Vitamin D and Bone Health
- Improving Nutrition as You Age
- Improving Urinary Incontinence
- Living Longer, Living Well – Your Guide to Healthy Ageing
- Managing Caregiver Stress
- Managing Chronic Pain
- Managing Common Mental Health Conditions in Older Adults
- Managing Multiple Chronic Health Conditions
- Managing Sedative-Hypnotic Use Among Older Adults
- Managing Sleep in Older Adults
- Managing Substance Use and Addictive Disorders As You Age
- Preventing and Managing Diabetes in Older Persons
- Preventing Falls at Home
- Recognizing and Managing Anxiety
- Recognizing and Managing Depression
- Recognizing and Managing Hearing Loss
- Safe Medication Use for Older Adults
- Staying Active As You Age
- Substitute Decision Makers and Powers of Attorney

ADDITIONAL COMMUNITY RESOURCES IN OUR SERIES:

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

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

This information is to be used for informational purposes only and is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Please consult your health care provider for advice about a specific medical condition. A single copy of these materials may be reprinted for non-commercial personal use only.

We would like to thank the following for their support of our Education Resources to Support Healthy Ageing Initiative:



**The Ben and
Hilda Katz
Foundation**



Mon Sheong Foundation and the Ben and Hilda Katz Foundation have generously provided funding to support printing and translation of our Education Resources to Support Healthy Ageing.

The Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility supported this initiative with funding through its Seniors Community Grant Program.