

DELIRIUM

Need to Knows provide older adults and their families with important information to enhance their hospital or nursing home stays. Communication and teamwork are important aspects of high-quality healthcare. The individual, family, and caregivers are vital members of the team.

Delirium is a new, sudden, and serious confusion episode that may change throughout the day or night. A person with delirium will have difficulty paying attention. Delirium is often caused by reversible conditions such as medication reactions, infections, and dehydration.

Why is it important?

Delirium, which can last for hours or weeks, is a problem in any unfamiliar setting such as a hospital or nursing home with different routines and people. Anesthesia and surgery can increase risk of delirium.

What you and your family can do:

Tell the healthcare team what is “normal” for you/your family member. Tell them about any changes in mood or behavior.

Ensure the use of devices such as glasses and hearing aids, if needed.

Ensure your loved one gets enough sleep.

Get your loved one moving! Activity can prevent and/or shorten the delirium.

Encourage your loved one to eat and drink regularly.

Be alert for signs of pain such as grimacing, restlessness, or not wanting to move or receive care. Let the healthcare team know right away.

Use a notebook as a “guest book” so your loved one can see that people are coming to visit them and provide cues to support orientation to person, place, and time such as clocks and family photos.

