



Preventing Delirium at Home

What is Delirium?

Delirium is a sudden, temporary onset of confusion that causes changes in the way people think and behave. Older adults are most at risk, especially those with memory issues. Knowing what signs to look for, and treating the symptoms early, can help save lives.

What causes Delirium?

Many things can cause delirium, including; infection, medication side effects, worsening of a chronic illness, dehydration, poor nutrition, constipation or diarrhea, pain, recent injury or fall, alcohol withdrawal, recent hospital stay, or poorly fitting hearing aids or glasses.

What are the signs of Delirium?

Some possible signs to look out for at home with your loved one include a sudden onset or sudden change in any of the following:

Confusion	Seeing or hearing things that are not there	Drifting between sleep and being awake	Trouble staying awake
Restlessness	Mixing up days and nights	Trouble concentrating	Not knowing where they are

Learn about Delirium

- Know the signs of delirium (listed above)
- Immediately tell their doctor or other health care team member if you notice any signs of delirium
- Know the difference between delirium and dementia (Dementia is the gradual loss of brain cells over time that results in memory loss and the decline of day-to-day thinking and function – it cannot be cured. Delirium had a sudden onset and can clear completely.)

Support Healthy Rest and Sleep

- Reduce noise and distractions
- Keep lights low or off when your loved one is resting
- Improve comfort with a pillow, blanket, warm drink or a back rub
- Avoid using sleeping pills, if possible
- Minimize daytime naps

Support Physical Activity

- Help your loved one sit and walk
- Talk with the health care team about safe exercise and activities

Support Healthy Eating and Drinking

- Encourage and help with eating meals
- Offer fluids often
- Eat meals sitting up in a chair

Support Good Hearing

- Encourage your loved one to wear hearing aids
- Make sure hearing aids are working properly

Support Good Vision

- Encourage your loved one to wear glasses or use a magnifying glass
- Keep glasses clean
- Use good light for reading or doing other tasks

Support Mental Stimulation

- When talking to your loved one keep sentences short, simple and easy to understand
- Talk about current events and what is going on around the person
- Read out loud, use large print or talking books

**This information sheet was created using information for the Vancouver Island Health Authority Delirium in the Older Person: A Guide for Families.

These resources are provided for information purposes only and are not intended as a substitute for medical care. If you have any questions about your health care, please consult with your health care provider. Inclusion of a resource does not imply endorsement by Trillium Health Partners.

The information in this handout is intended only for the person it was given to by the health care team. It does not replace the advice or directions given to you by your doctor.