NUHS@HOME
National University Health System

Delirium



What is Delirium?

Delirium is a change in a person's awareness, attention and mental state often due to an underlying medical or physical problem.

Some common causes of delirium include pain, constipation and infection.

Signs of Delirium

Do inform your medical team if you suspect your loved one has features of delirium.

- New or worsening confusion
- Worsening drowsiness
- Disorientation
- Inability to maintain attention
- New delusions or hallucinations

Management of Delirium

Treatment of delirium involves addressing the underlying cause of delirium, such as treatment of lung or urinary tract infection.

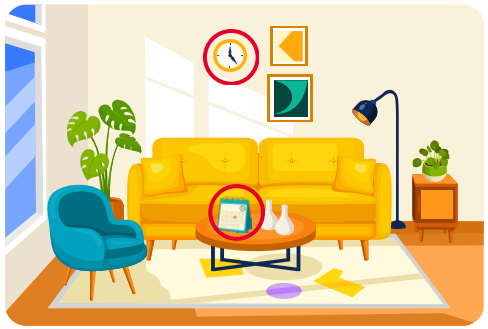
Simple measures that the family can do to aid in management of delirium at home:



Encourage safe ambulation with caregiver



Sit out in chairs during meals



Regular orientation to the environment:

- Gentle reminders to patient about place, date and time, about three times a day
- Ensure clocks and calendars are easily visible at home

Management of Delirium



If the patient requires glasses or hearing aides, ensure that they are readily available and used during communication.



Optimise sleep environment:

- Turn off bright lights during sleep
- Avoid coffee or tea after lunch
- Avoid drinking too much water before sleep
- Empty bladder once prior to sleep



Encourage structured activities such as playing simple card games, reading news to them, or bringing patients along corridors for walks if deemed safe by medical team.

Management of Delirium



Encourage food and fluid intake. Avoid dehydration. But if you are instructed by your medical team to restrict fluid intake, do double check with them before increasing water intake excessively.

Inform the medical team if your loved one is not eating well.



Ensure regular bowel clearance.

A good gauge will be to pass motion at least once a day or every other day.

Other tips on caring for a patient with Delirium



Check for unmet needs, such as discomfort, constipation or itch.



Acknowledge their feelings and avoid confrontation.

Your loved one is not “purposely” trying to anger you, but rather the delirium may have caused your loved one to act in a different manner from the past.



Address requests using simple, creative strategies where possible.

Distract by redirecting their attention to another activity.

Consequences of Delirium



Reduced function



Poorer health outcomes



Cognitive impairment



Falls



In older adults, especially those with pre-existing cognitive impairment, delirium can persist after the acute illness, sometimes for weeks or months

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