

# What is Delirium?

Delirium is a short-term state of confusion that makes it hard to focus or think clearly. It can start quickly, in just a few hours or days, and may last for a short time or longer time. Delirium is different from dementia. Dementia gets worse over time and does not go away. Delirium is common in older adults and can make it hard to recover from illness or injury. It also increases the risk of falls and injuries. Delirium needs quick medical care and can often be prevented.

## Who is at Risk for Delirium?

**People are more likely to get delirium if they:**

- Are 65 years old or older
- Have dementia or depression
- Need help with daily activities such as bathing, dressing or eating
- Have trouble seeing or hearing
- Are not drinking or eating enough
- Take many different medications
- Have several medical problems
- Have had surgery (can cause short-term confusion)

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## What Are the Symptoms of Delirium?

**Symptoms can be different for each person and may come and go. They include:**

- Trouble understanding what is happening
- Confusion about daily events, routines, or people
- Saying things that do not make sense
- Changes in personality
- Seeing or hearing things that are not real
- Thinking others are trying to harm them
- Becoming very quiet and withdrawn
- Feeling anxious, stressed, or restless
- Changes in sleep and eating habits
- Slurred or rambling speech

## How to Care for Someone with Delirium

**If you notice signs of delirium, tell a doctor or nurse right away. You can also help by:**

- Keeping the room quiet and peaceful
- Placing familiar objects nearby
- Using soft lighting (not too bright)
- Making sure glasses, hearing aids, and dentures are used properly
- Encouraging walking or movement to prevent falls
- Ensuring they eat and drink enough
- Staying with them and reminding them of the date, time and where they are
- Speaking calmly and reassuring them
- Giving one simple instruction at a time
- Trying gentle massages, which may help them relax
- Keeping an updated list of their medications and medical history

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