

What is delirium?

Delirium is a common and serious occurrence in older adults. It is a sudden change in a person's ability to think, remember and understand. Delirium can last days or weeks and occurs most often after an illness or stressful event such as a fall or hospital stay. It can also be caused by changes in medication, recent surgery, constipation, untreated pain, infection or dehydration.

What should you do if a delirium is suspected?

Delirium is a medical emergency. Speak to a health care provider if you notice any signs of confusion, being unable to focus, being easily distracted, hearing voices or seeing things that are not there, talking nonsense, changes in mood or being quieter than usual. Write down any details you know about the signs observed, such as when they started. It is also important to have an up-to-date list of the medications used by the older adult. This will help the health care provider figure out the best way to help the person with delirium. It is important to get help quickly as delirium is usually reversible with proper treatment.

There is an eLearning Course on this topic where the following is discussed in more detail:

- What is delirium?
- What are the signs of delirium?
- What are the causes of delirium?
- How is delirium treated and managed?
- How can delirium be prevented?

References

Alzheimer's Society. (2019). Delirium. Retrieved from <https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/get-support/daily-living/delirium>

Canadian Coalition for Seniors' Mental Health (CCSMH). (2016). National guidelines for seniors' mental health: The assessment and treatment of delirium. Retrieved from <https://ccsmh.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/A-Delirium-ENG-R3-1-FINAL.pdf>

Health in Aging. (2017). Delirium - Unique to older adults. Retrieved from <http://www.healthinaging.org/aging-and-health-a-to-z/topic:delirium/info:unique-to-older-adults/>