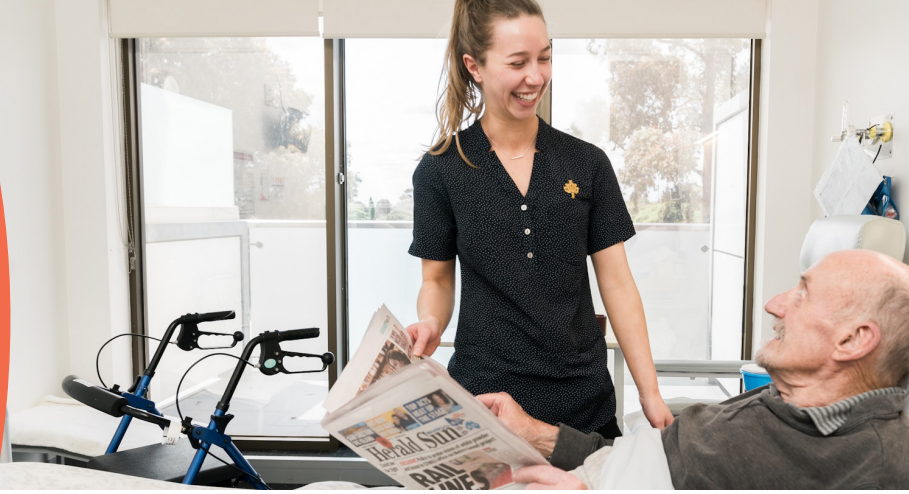


Delirium



Delirium is a medical condition characterised by changes in a person's thinking or behaviour. Delirium may cause sufferers to be confused, agitated, quiet or drowsy. It occurs most often in elderly people and, while common, can be quite serious.

Onset is normally very sudden, but usually lasts only for a few days.

Who is at risk of developing delirium?

Those who:

- are very unwell
- have a history of dementia or depression
- are 65 years or older
- have impaired hearing or eyesight and do not have their hearing aids or glasses with them
- have been admitted with dehydration or malnutrition
- are taking multiple medications
- have recently had surgical procedures.

What changes may occur?

People with delirium may:

- appear confused, forgetful and unable to pay attention
- be very agitated, quiet, withdrawn and/or drowsy
- be unsure of their surroundings
- say things that do not make sense
- see things that are not there
- have changes in personality and behaviours
- have changes to sleeping habits
- display physical changes, such as ability to talk, walk or swallow
- lose control of their bladder or bowel.

What causes delirium?

Some of the common causes of delirium include:

- infection
- multiple physical illnesses
- severe pain
- dehydration / malnutrition
- constipation
- medications, including 'over the counter' medicines
- unfamiliar surroundings
- withdrawal from medication, alcohol or other substances.

How is delirium treated?

Delirium is generally associated with an underlying physical illness; however it is not always possible to identify the cause. Caregivers will do a thorough medical assessment to look for and treat the underlying cause of the delirium.

Treatment includes reducing the risk of complications and lessening symptoms.

How can you as a patient, carer or family assist?

As a patient, you can provide valuable information to caregivers, such as letting us know if you are having trouble with your memory and thinking.

As a carer or family member, it is important to tell caregivers about sudden changes in the patient's mental or physical condition. If someone has a pre-existing condition, such as dementia, let caregivers know the person's routine and how to comfort them if they become agitated. This ensures that caregivers can offer the best care possible.

Carers are important too!

Are you taking care of yourself?

Take regular breaks and don't be afraid to ask for help.



- It is reassuring for people with delirium to see familiar faces.
- Encourage other family and friends to help as well.
- Speak slowly and in a clear voice, identify both yourself and the person by name.
- Only visit in small groups of one or two people.
- Encourage and assist the person to eat and drink fluids.
- Ask caregivers about any medical restrictions before offering food outside of hospital meals.
- Bring in personal items that remind the patient of home, such as family pictures, and their own clothes.
- Play the patient's favourite music / radio stations.
- Impairments to vision or hearing can make their confusion worse. If someone with delirium usually wears glasses or hearing aids, make sure they have them on.
- If the person is agitated or aggressive, do not try to restrain them. If they want to walk around, let them do that. You can help by walking with them and ensuring that the area is free from hazards.
- Knowing the time of day can reduce confusion. Remind the person where they are, the day of the week and what time it is.

Will delirium reoccur?

Patients who have previously experienced delirium have a higher risk of experiencing it again. If you have any concerns or questions about delirium, talk to a doctor or ask our caregivers.

Additional information

Aged Care Information Line: 1800 500 853

Caring for Cognitive Impairment:
www.cognitivecare.gov.au

Carers Australia: 1800 242 636 or
www.carersaustralia.com.au

My Aged Care: 1800 200 422 or
www.myagedcare.gov.au

National Dementia Hotline: 1800 100 500

This information has been reproduced with permission from Fiona Stanley Fremantle Hospitals Group Cognitive Impairment Project (South Metropolitan Health Service).

St John of God Frankston Rehabilitation Hospital
255-265 Cranbourne Road, Frankston VIC 3199
T. (03) 9788 3333 E. info.frankston@sjog.org.au

St John of God Langmore Centre
3 Gibb Street, Berwick 3806
T. (03) 9773 7000 E. info.langmore@sjog.org.au

St John of God Berwick Hospital
75 Kangan Drive, Berwick 3806
T. (03) 8784 5000 E. info.berwick@sjog.org.au



ST JOHN OF GOD
Health Care

Published July 2022
St John of God Health Care Inc.
ARBN 051 960 911. ABN 21 930 207 958