



Delirium

Delirium is also known as "acute confusional state". Delirium is a sign that someone is physically unwell and is a medical emergency.

Delirium often starts suddenly and causes changes in alertness and levels of attention. This can fluctuate throughout the day. Some signs include:

- Sudden change in behaviour
- More confused over the past few days/hours
- Difficulty following a conversation
- Rambling and jumping from topic to topic
- More sleepy (**hypoactive**) or agitated (**hyperactive**)
- Hallucinations
- Incontinence

Delirium is not dementia and usually clears when the cause is treated.

Delirium affects around 1 in 10 of all hospital patients. Around 30% are elderly and are either admitted with a delirium or suffer with delirium during their hospital stay. Delirium is sometimes the only symptom evident in an older person.

The 6 Common Causes of Delirium are:

- **P**ain
- **I**nfection
- **N**utrition
- **C**onstipation
- **H**ydration
- **M**edication
- **E**nvironment

Think PINCH ME

The cause of the delirium should be identified and treated. Sometimes there may be more than 1 cause. Delirium can improve within days of the cause being treated but can also take weeks/months, particularly in those with an underlying cognitive impairment. The chance of re-occurrence is increased in someone who has previously suffered a delirium.

Strategies to help:

- Explanations and reassurance
- Reorientation
- Look after the person's physical needs: drinking, eating, toileting, sleep, falls prevention and treat any infection or medical causes e.g. pain.