

***PATIENT INFORMATION***



**Delirium**  
Information for  
Patients and  
Carers

**Delirium** (also known as acute confusion or toxic confusion) can occur at any age, but is most likely to be seen in the very young or the elderly. Approximately 15-20% of all elderly people admitted to hospital suffer with delirium either on admission or during their stay in hospital.

## Symptoms

The confusion occurs over a few hours or a few weeks

It may present as apathy/loss of interest, sleepiness, confusion or agitation with over activity such as wandering.

The confusion tends to be worse at night and fluctuates, so there may be periods when the person is lucid.

The person may not be aware of the time of day or where they are. They may not recognize people close to them and may be unable to remember recent events.

They may have unusual thoughts such as their increased importance or think that someone is out to harm them.

They may hear or see things that are not there.

## Causes

These can include:

Infections such as urinary tract infection and chest infection

Drugs

Respiratory and heart disease

Renal and liver disease

Low blood sugar

Strokes

Thyroid problems

Urinary retention & constipation

Bereavement

Malnutrition and dehydration

Trauma of any kind

Alcohol or drug withdrawal

In many cases there may be more than 1 cause found and the causes may not always be obvious. In some case no cause is identified

Previous episodes of confusion increase the risk of having a further episode.

## How to help

You can support the person by:

Speaking clearly, using simple sentences

Address the person by name

Be prepared to say the same thing several times

Don't argue with them

Make sure that your face can be clearly seen

Give the person plenty of time to answer

Bring in items from home such as

photographs

Spend time with your relative if at all possible

Encourage the person to dress in their own clothes

Understand that any personality change is due to the underlying problem

Make sure that the person is wearing their glasses and their hearing aid

The confusion may last anything from a few days to a couple of months. In some instances symptoms may never go away and may be the initial signs of dementia

If you have concerns and need to talk please either

- Let the ward team know, or
- contact your General Practitioner, or
- contact the Dementia Specialist Nurse on 📞 **(01803) 655859**