THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT DELIRIUM

In the Clinic
Annals of Internal Medicine

What is delirium?

- A state of severe confusion that may come and go.
- The confusion may include difficulty staying focused and fully alert and conscious.
- It may include disorientation and inability to remember recent events.

What are risk factors for delirium?

- Being older than 65.
- Having severe, chronic, or terminal illness.
- Having previous brain disease or damage, such as dementia, Parkinson disease, or stroke.
- Having vision or hearing impairment.
- Being malnourished or dehydrated.

What are the common triggers for delirium?

- Having multiple medical procedures.
- Sudden, severe illness, particularly infection.
- Admission to the ICU.
- Certain medications, particularly narcotics, antidepressants, anticonvulsants, or sleep medications, or taking multiple medications.
- Drug or alcohol abuse.
- Emotional stress.

How does delirium differ from dementia?

- Delirium develops suddenly, over a few hours or days.
- Dementia develops over many months or years.
- Delirium is usually temporary and goes away once the cause is treated
- Dementia is usually long-lasting and usually does not get better.

What should you do if a family members has delirium?

- Seek immediate medical attention.
- Try to provide information to the doctor about the patient's medications and medical conditions.
- The doctor will ask when the symptoms of delirium started and how behavior has changed specifically.

For More Information

www.mayoclinic.com/health/delirium/DS01064
Information on delirium from Mayo Clinic.

www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/delirium.html
Information resources on delirium from the National Institutes of Health's MedlinePlus.

www.healthinaging.org/aginginthekno w/chapters_ch_trial.asp?ch=57
Information on delirium, including how it differs from dementia, from the Foundation for Health in Aging.

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Patient Information