THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT DELIRIUM

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 member 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.

Information resources on delirium from the National Institutes of Health’s MedlinePlus.

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