



COMMON QUESTIONS REGARDING DELIRIUM

? 1. "My loved one is not himself /herself; I am worried."

Delirium causes changes to how your loved one thinks and behaves due to an underlying physical disorder with their body.

As delirium affects their ability to express what they feel clearly, do take comfort that certain remarks they make are often unintended. Your physical companionship and the presence of close family/friends can still be felt by your loved one.

? 2. "How long will it last for? Will it get better?"

Delirium may last from days to months. During this time, your loved one will have ups and downs with 'good days' and 'bad days'. In the elderly or more vulnerable patients, they sometimes never make a full recovery from delirium.

? 3. "Can I bring my loved one home in this confused state?"

It is best to discuss your loved one's unique scenario with their doctor or nurse-in-charge. They will be able to give you the best advice and ensure that the appropriate community services are activated to assist you.

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TTSH Integrated Care Hub, Level 5
Contact:
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Department of
Palliative Medicine

Delirium



What is Delirium?

It is a sudden change in the mental state of your loved one. It happens commonly in the very ill (e.g. advanced cancer) and / or the elderly. It is usually caused by a sudden illness like an infection, worsening organ function, stroke or heart attack etc.

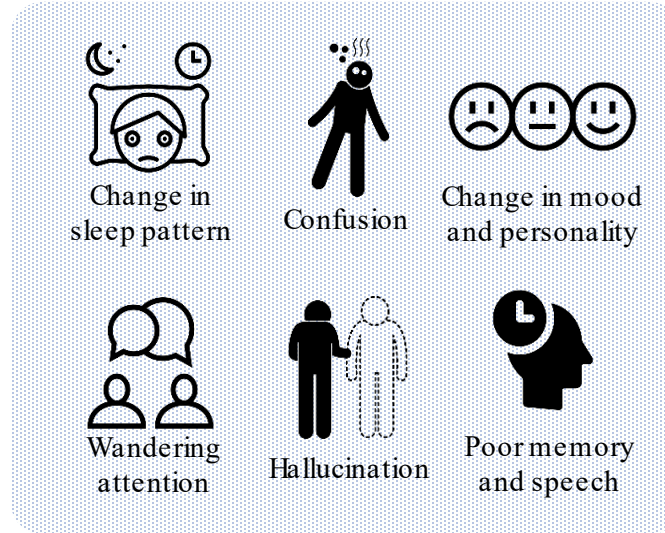
3 Main Types of Delirium

- (a) **Hypoactive:** Your loved one is quieter and sleeps more than usual
- (b) **Hyperactive:** Your loved one becomes confused, agitated and restless
- (c) **Mixed:** Your loved one goes back and forth between between the hypoactive and hyperactive state

Treatment of Delirium

1. Treat the underlying medical condition
2. If the condition is incurable, treatment will focus on managing the agitation and restlessness

Signs and Symptoms of Delirium



Medications for Delirium

The doctor may prescribe medication to calm your loved one down for him/her to get more rest.

Some of the common medications used include:

1. **Olanzapine:** Can be dissolved under tongue, and is quickly absorbed into the body
2. **Haloperidol:** Comes in the form of liquid drops or injections
3. **Midazolam:** Can be given as an injection

What can I do to help my loved one?

Environment

- Re-orientate your loved one to the time of day / location they are in.
- Ensure the environment in the room is soothing and calm.
- Play familiar music that your loved one enjoys.
- Bring personal items that can bring comfort like a pillow, bolster, family photo or aromatherapy.

Physical Activities

- Ensure good and regular bowel and bladder clearance.
- Use his/her own glasses and hearing aid to reduce problems with seeing and hearing.
- Engage your loved one in the day by sitting out in a chair, participating in activities together. This helps keep their natural sleep cycle.
- Avoid physical restraints: if your loved one keeps pulling on medical devices, hand mittens are a better alternative.

Psychological Support

- Provide reassurance to your loved one by being present with your words and touch. However, try to avoid tiring your loved one with too many visitors.