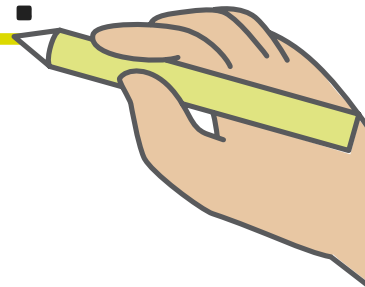


# WHAT IS DELIRIUM?

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Information on how to recognise delirium and what to do about it



You are being provided with this leaflet because you are either at higher risk of developing delirium, you have a current delirium, or your loved one has experienced delirium.

## What is delirium?

Delirium is a common condition. People with delirium may have trouble thinking and remembering, may feel frightened or upset, see or hear things which are not there. It can come on over hours or days. It is not a permanent illness.

### **What causes delirium?**

There are many things that can trigger a person to develop delirium. These are called underlying illnesses, for example: pain, infections, not eating or drinking enough, constipation and side effects of medicines.

### **Who can get delirium?**

People can develop delirium anywhere such as in hospital, care homes and living at home. It is more common for people who:

- **Are aged over 65 years.**
- **Experience cognitive impairment or dementia or had delirium before.**
- **Have had recent surgery, for example for a broken hip.**
- **Have many medical conditions, or sight or hearing loss.**

### **How to spot delirium?**

To reduce the possible impact of delirium it's important to spot the signs **as early as possible** that someone is developing it.

The behaviour of a person with delirium will change quickly, over hours or days. If you spot any of these signs **speak to a doctor or a nurse**.

- **They may be restless and agitated.**
- **They may be withdrawn and drowsy.**
- **They might not know where they are.**
- **They might not recognise friends and family.**
- **They might not be able to hold a conversation.**
- **They may see or hear things which aren't there, or be suspicious of people around them.**

## How to help someone with delirium

The following things help somebody with delirium feel better and get well.



Encourage to eat regularly, little and often if they are not eating 3 meals a day.



Encourage drinking 6-8 cups a day.



Encourage them to wear their glasses if they have these and hearing aids.



Encourage exercise and getting up out of bed.



Make sure they get a good night's sleep.



Encourage going to the toilet regularly, to avoid becoming constipated.



Ask a doctor or pharmacist to check if they are taking multiple medicines, or in pain.



Explain where they are, if they are in an unfamiliar place, write things to help with remembering.



Use things they know such as photographs to chat with them. Encourage them to engage in activities and hobbies that they like.



Use clocks and newspapers to remind them of the date and time.

## Getting better

Most people do recover. As we treat the underlying illness, the person will slowly come back to their normal self. They might struggle with day-to-day things for a few days or weeks.

Someone who has had delirium once is more likely to get it again. Make sure you do everything in the list above to reduce the risk of them from getting delirium again. Remember to **speak to a doctor or nurse**, if you spot the signs of delirium.

Some people have symptoms which never go away. If they still have problems with thinking or remembering things after several months, speak to a doctor or a nurse.

### Further information

- **Dementia United** have a longer version of this leaflet, which can be accessed via the website **[dementia-united.org.uk/delirium-toolkit-training-resources/](https://dementia-united.org.uk/delirium-toolkit-training-resources/)**
- (Organisations which support those with delirium also help people living with dementia, who are at higher risk of developing delirium.)
- **Age UK**: Information and resources on frailty and delirium: **[ageuk.org.uk/our-impact/policy-research/frailty-in-older-people/common-conditions-frailty/](https://ageuk.org.uk/our-impact/policy-research/frailty-in-older-people/common-conditions-frailty/)**. You can also call the Age UK Advice Line on **0800 678 1602**
- **Dementia UK**: Dementia UK provides specialist dementia support for families. Their delirium booklet can be downloaded from **[dementiauk.org](https://dementiauk.org)**. They also have a helpline: **0800 888 667**

# GET IN TOUCH



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