What is delirium?

Someone with delirium may suddenly become confused, unusually sleepy, restless, frightened or visibly upset. Delirium is a sudden change in attention and thinking that starts over hours or days. Families often say: "They are not themselves."

Common signs

- Sudden confusion about where they are, the time or what is happening
- Trouble paying attention or following a conversation
- Unusual sleepiness, withdrawing from other people or responding slowly
- Restlessness, fear, anger or visible distress
- Seeing or hearing things that are not there, or new fears or beliefs that are out of character
- Symptoms that may come and go, often worse in the evening or at night

The quiet, sleepy form is common and particularly easy to miss.

Delirium is different from dementia

Dementia usually develops over months or years. Delirium comes on over hours or days and often changes during the day. A person with dementia can also develop delirium. If the person suddenly gets worse, they need medical assessment now.

Words to use

> **"They are not their normal self. This began on [day or time]. I think this could be delirium. Could they be assessed now?"**

What causes it?

Illness, injury, surgery or a change in medicines can disrupt how the brain works. Common causes include infection, pain, dehydration (too little fluid in the body) and difficulty passing stools. There may be more than one cause.

How is it treated?

Treatment means finding and treating the cause or causes. Care also includes safe help with food and drink, movement, sleep, glasses, hearing aids and calm reassurance. No medicine cures delirium itself. In some situations, a doctor or nurse may consider medicine for severe distress or an immediate risk of harm. Many people improve, but recovery may be slow.

Get medical help now

Delirium (acute confusion) is a medical emergency. If it begins at home or elsewhere outside a care setting, phone the local emergency number now. In a hospital or other care setting, tell staff immediately and describe the change from normal.

If there is an agreed palliative care plan for treating symptoms and keeping the person comfortable, contact that team urgently and follow the plan.

Read more: https://deliriumsupport.com/what-is-delirium/

Get help now: https://deliriumsupport.com/get-help-now/

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