

Delirium Action Plan

Delirium is a sudden inability to think clearly and pay attention. It is common among older people, especially people with dementia. Delirium comes on quickly, over hours or a few days. It can be a sign of a serious underlying medical problem. **If you notice any of the changes below, think of a delirium.** Prompt medical attention may help to prevent a hospital admission.

What to look out for:

Delirium can develop quickly, usually over hours or days. A person with delirium may:

- Become confused and forgetful
- Become unable to pay attention
- Become different from their normal selves
- Become either very agitated or quiet and withdrawn
- Become unsure of the time of day or where they are
- Have garbled or confused speech
- Have difficulty following a conversation
- Have changes to their sleeping habits such as staying awake at night and being drowsy during the day
- See or hear things that are not there, but which are very real to them
- Lose control of their bladder or bowels.

If you notice signs of delirium:

- Call the patient's GP as soon as possible.
- Tell the practice you suspect delirium and request an assessment that day.

If the changes occurred over a few minutes, think of stroke:

- Call 000 for ambulance if transfer to hospital is in line with person's wishes.

GP Phone Number:

<<Practice/Location:Phone>>

Doctors Name:

<<Doctor:Name>>

What Practice?

<<Practice/Location:Name>>

After Hours Phone Number:

Local Hospital

Other/family contacts:

<<Patient Demographics:Emergency Contact>> <<Patient

Demographics:Emergency Contact Phone>>

What causes delirium?

Delirium can have many causes. Most commonly it is caused by:

- Infection
- Constipation
- Dehydration
- Strong pain
- Medicines

Once the person has appropriate medical care, you can still help care for them.

- Encourage and assist someone with delirium to have enough food and fluids.
- Knowing the time of day can reduce confusion. Remind the person where they are, and what day and time it is.
- It is reassuring for people with delirium to see familiar people. Visit as often as you can and try to be available to help with their care.

Further Advice

healthdirect – 1800 022 222

Speak to a registered nurse or doctor 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to get health advice you can trust. This is a free service.

Notes

“Adapted with permission from Healthy North Coast HealthPathways Dementia Action Plan”.