

Understanding delirium in later life



What is delirium?

- Delirium is a severe and sudden decline in the mind.¹
- It can be thought of like sudden heart failure, but for the brain.¹
- Delirium is not a disease itself but a complication of other medical problems, such as infection, dehydration or pain.^{1,2}
- Delirium is a medical emergency that needs to be treated.³

What does delirium look like?^{1,3}

Delirium is the sudden change in:

Awareness: not knowing what day it is or difficulty focusing

Movement: slower, inactive or more active than usual

Sleep: drowsiness, time of day or nightmares

Emotions: restless, anxious, hostile, overly happy or withdrawn

Thinking: hear/see things or not make sense

How can I stay well?^{3,4}

- Stay hydrated
- Be active
- Eat a well-balanced diet
- Create a routine for going to bed
- Spend time with loved ones
- Keep a clock or calendar nearby

Where can I get help?



Resources and support for delirium and other mental health problems are available in your community.

For more information, connect with any of the following organizations:

ConnexOntario

Contact for 24/7, confidential and free information about mental health, addiction and problem gambling services throughout Ontario.

www.connexontario.ca
1-866-531-2600

Canadian Coalition for Seniors' Mental Health

www.ccsmh.ca 289-846-5383

Canadian Mental Health Association

<https://ontario.cmha.ca/>
1-800-875-6213

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

www.camh.ca 1-800-463-2338

Community Information Centres

www.211Ontario.ca Dial 211

Resources

Delirium booklet for patients, families, and friends, University Health Network https://www.uhn.ca/PatientsFamilies/Health_Information/Health_Topics/Documents/Delirium.pdf

References

1. Inouye, S.K., Westendorp, R.G. & Saczynski, J.S. (2014). Delirium in elderly people. *The Lancet*, 383 (9920), 911–922.
2. Burns, A., Gallagley, A. & Byrne, J. (2004). Delirium. *Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery & Psychiatry*, 75 (3), 362–367.
3. Canadian Coalition for Seniors' Mental Health (2009.) *Delirium in older adults: A guide for seniors and their families*. Toronto, Ontario.
4. Oh, E.S., Fong, T.G., Hsieh, T.T. & Inouye, S.K. (2017). Delirium in older persons: advances in diagnosis and treatment. *Jama*, 318 (12), 1161–1174.

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