

Delirium

What is delirium?

Delirium is a sudden episode of confusion. It lowers your ability to think clearly, focus, or stay alert. Delirium is usually caused by another illness.

Who gets it?

Delirium is common in older people, especially when in the hospital. About one in three older persons in the hospital gets it.

How is it prevented?

Family members and caregivers can help prevent delirium by:

- Learning more about it from doctors and nurses
- Putting a clock and a calendar in the hospital room
- Encouraging the use of glasses, dentures, or hearing aids
- Putting familiar objects in the hospital room (for example, photographs, pillows, and a radio)
- Reorienting the patient as needed (for example, telling the patient the current date and time, where he or she is, and who visitors are)

- Extending visitation times (five hours daily)
- Keeping pen and paper for notes and messages
- Eating meals with the patient
- Encouraging the patient to drink fluids
- Providing gentle massage
- Enjoying music with the patient or reading books aloud to the patient

Where can I get more information?

Your doctor

AAFP's Patient Education Resource
<http://familydoctor.org>

HealthinAging.org
<http://healthinaging.org/aging-and-health-a-to-z/topic:delirium/>

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This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <http://familydoctor.org>.

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