

# 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/>

August 2014

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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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