

INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS

Delirium (acute confusion)

What is delirium?

Delirium is a sign that someone is physically unwell.

People who become delirious may start behaving in ways that are unusual for them. For example, they may become more agitated than normal or feel more sleepy and withdrawn.

It may be indicated by a sudden change in behaviour over a few hours or days, and tends to vary at different times of day. People may be confused at some times and then seem their normal selves at other times.

It may be more difficult to hold a conversation with them or they may ramble and jump from one topic to another. They may not know where they are or think they are somewhere completely different, on holiday for example.

Sometimes people who are delirious may see things that other people can't see or believe things that are not true.

It does not mean that they are going mad or that they will be so confused forever.

What causes delirium?

The most common causes are:

- Infection
- Constipation
- Dehydration
- Pain after a fall or surgery
- Reaction to medication.

Who can get delirium?

Anyone of any age, but it is most common in older people and children. People with dementia are more likely to get delirium and cannot always say what is wrong or how they feel.

How do you treat delirium?

The best treatment is to treat the cause. If you are visiting someone who appears unusually confused, they may be delirious and may not remember who you are. In this case:

- Be very calm and patient, avoid being confrontational.
- Remind them where they are and who you are.
- Encourage them to drink plenty of water or juice. This can prevent and treat dehydration and constipation.
- They may need treatment from their doctor for an infection, pain or other illness.
- Bring in items that are familiar to them to place by their bedside, e.g. photographs.

How long does it last?

Delirium is NOT permanent in most people.

In adults who are fairly healthy, delirium may only last a few days once the cause has been found and treated.

In older people, the effects of delirium can often last longer and some confusion may still be noticeable for several weeks after the cause has been treated.

When the person who has had delirium is discharged from hospital, their GP will be told about what has happened.

What should I do if I am worried about my friend or relative?

If you are worried about your friend or relative you can talk to a member of staff about your concerns.

It is very important to tell a member of staff if you notice that someone has become more confused than usual. This is to make sure that the person gets the care and treatment they need.

Further sources of information

NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk/conditions

Our website: www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk

Patient Experience Team (PET)

PET is available to help with any of your compliments, concerns or complaints, and will ensure a prompt and efficient service.

King's Mill Hospital: 01623 672222

Newark Hospital: 01636 685692

Email: sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net

If you would like this information in an alternative format, for example large print or easy read, or if you need help with communicating with us, for example because you use British Sign Language, please let us know. You can call the Patient Experience Team on 01623 672222 or email sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net.

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant health professional would give you.

External websites may be referred to in specific cases. Any external websites are provided for your information and convenience. We cannot accept responsibility for the information found on them.

If you require a full list of references for this leaflet, please email sfh-tr.patientinformation@nhs.net or telephone 01623 622515, extension 6927.

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