

# Learning About Delirium



## What is delirium?

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Delirium is a sudden change in mental condition. It leads to confusion and unusual behavior. Delirium is also called acute confusional state.

Delirium affects all age groups. It can result from problems that affect the brain, such as stroke. It can also happen after an infection or when using certain medicines. Pain may also cause the problem.

Seeing delirium in a loved one can be scary and sad. But it will go away most of the time. It usually lasts hours to days.

The doctor will look for a cause and take steps to treat it and keep your loved one comfortable.

## What are the symptoms?

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Symptoms of delirium usually develop over several hours to a few days. Symptoms may change and be more or less severe.

Symptoms include:

- A short attention span.
- Confusion. This is not knowing where you are, what time it is, or who others are.
- Hallucinations. This usually is seeing or hearing things that are not really there.
- Delusions. This is believing things that aren't true.
- Illusions. This is making a mistake in what you think is real. For example, you think a child is crying, but it's a pillow.
- Disorganized thinking.

## How is delirium treated?

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The doctor may:

- Find and treat the cause. This could be:
  - Not getting enough fluids.
  - An infection.
  - A medicine or combination of medicines.
  - Another medical problem.
- Prescribe a medicine.
- Make the hospital room as quiet as possible.

You may be able to help your loved one by being present and talking to and touching him or her.

**Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety.** Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

## Where can you learn more?

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Go to <https://www.healthwise.net/patiented>

Enter **Z511** in the search box to learn more about "**Learning About Delirium**".

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