

### **What is Delirium?**

Delirium is basically confusion that comes on very fast, sometimes in just a few hours. When someone becomes delirious, it means that they can not think clearly, have trouble paying attention and are not aware of what is going on around them. Sometimes they may even see or hear things that are not really there, but seems very real to them.

### **Is delirium the same as dementia?**

Unlike delirium, dementia comes on gradually, over months or even years. In most cases dementia is a permanent condition, while delirium usually clears up after a few days to weeks.

### **What could have caused this?**

- Medications or abused drugs
- Poisons
- Drug or alcohol withdrawal
- Medical illnesses like infections or diabetes
- Medical Procedures like surgery
- Mental illnesses
- Severe pain
- Prolonged lack of sleep

### **Can anything be done about it?**

The doctor and rest of the medical team will try to identify anything that may be causing the delirium or making it worse. They may want to give less or different medicines, wake them up everyday, and treat conditions that could be causing the delirium, like infection.

### **Is there anything I can do about it?**

The best thing that you can do to help is to work together with your loved one's nurses and doctors. Provide doctors and nurses with information regarding any time your loved one has been confused because of illness or medications in the past. Help to reorient him or her often regarding the date, time, where he/she is and why, and so on. If your loved one is experiencing agitated delirium, the doctors and nurses might ask you to sit with your loved ones and help calm them down. They might also ask you to help provide a good sleeping environment for your loved one. If your loved one wears glasses or hearing aids, bring them to the hospital so that he or she can use them. It is also very important to be open and honest with your doctors and nurses regarding any behaviors that you notice in your loved one – even after you leave the hospital.

### **Are there any long-term problems that delirium can cause?**

We don't know. Ongoing studies are being done to answer this question. Delirium is traditionally considered to be a transient problem that resolves once the cause is removed and the person gets better, however, there is increasing evidence that some patients do develop a dementia-like thinking problem. It is really too early in this area of medicine to know for sure.