

Preventing delirium while in hospital



When an older person becomes ill and goes into the hospital, there is an increased risk of developing delirium and other problems. Delirium is a sudden confused state of mind. It may occur during an illness or after an operation.

This pamphlet describes simple care you can do to prevent delirium. These measures can also help to decrease the severity of delirium.

What does delirium look like?

People with delirium can act confused and may:

- have trouble paying attention
- be restless and upset
- slur their speech
- not make any sense
- see and hear imaginary things
- mix up days and nights
- drift between sleep and wakefulness
- be forgetful
- have trouble concentrating
- be more alert than normal
- not know where they are
- have trouble staying awake
- sometimes be confused and then suddenly okay

Delirium

Simple ways to prevent delirium:

1. **Vision and Hearing:** It is very important that glasses and hearing aids are worn while in the hospital. Hearing amplifiers are available for patients.



2. **Mobility/Walking:** People need to continue walking even when they are ill. Try to walk at least 3 times a day. Ask the nurse or physiotherapist if the patient needs help to walk. If the patient is able, walk with them in the hallway even if for a short distance. Talk to staff about the plan for walking. If the person stops walking, talk to the staff about why this has happened and ask about the plan to get the patient walking again.

Physiotherapists are specialists in walking and can provide expert help if needed.

To help with getting out of bed:

- Try to encourage the patient to be up and out of bed for every meal.
- Avoid restraints and discuss your thinking and feeling about the risk of falls with staff.



3. **Dehydration (being too dry):**

Dehydration occurs when there is too little water in the body. Try to encourage drinking 4 to 6 glasses of fluid daily.



Sometimes patients will be limited in how much they can drink because of their medical condition. The staff will let caregivers know about this.

To encourage drinking:

- Offer frequent sips of fluids throughout your visit in a casual way. Keep a relaxed social conversation going as you offer fluid.
- Have a drink yourself while the patient is drinking. People take in more when someone is drinking with them.

Help the patient maintain a clean fresh mouth. Locate their mouthwash and offer to brush their dentures. They will feel more like eating and drinking.

4. **Eating:** Many people lose interest in eating when they become ill.

- Try to arrange visits at meal times.
- Clean dentures before eating.
- Encourage the patient to be up in the chair at mealtime.
- If the patient does not like the food, ask about food choices or bring in favourite foods.
- Help to complete the patient's menu.
- Talk to the staff if the patient is coughing while eating. This may mean there is a swallowing problem.
- If you are worried about weight loss, talk with the staff about your concerns.



5. **Sleep:** Sleep is often disrupted while in hospital. Being ill, hospital noise, decreased exercise, pain and many other conditions can interfere with sleep.

- Tell the staff about the patient's usual bedtime routines.
- Encourage walking during the day.
- Limit daytime sleeping to short naps.
- Offer a backrub if visiting at night.
- Avoid caffeine after 3:00 pm.
- Warm flannel blankets may be available from the blanket warmer and can be very soothing.
- Avoid pills for sleep. They can contribute to falls and daytime drowsiness the next day.



6. **Activities and mental stimulation:**

Activities that bring the patient pleasure is an important part of recovery, bring in:

- favourite music
- magazines, newspapers, cross word puzzles
- favourite pictures provide a conversation piece
- a calendar, talk about the seasons, month and date



If delirium develops

- Tell the staff if you see a change in the patient's thinking.
- Develop a plan of care with the staff to help with the confusion.
- Try to have family members present as much as possible.
The patient will be less anxious.
- Continue with all the ways to prevent delirium.



Care for the caregivers

Looking after a person in hospital can be hard. Family members tell us they get very tired and sometimes feel very guilty when they are not at the hospital.

- Ensure other family members know the person is in the hospital. Ask them to help with the simple ways described in this pamphlet.
 - If you become very tired, cut back on the length of your visits or how often you visit. Let the staff know you are doing this.
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- Be sure to continue with activities that relax you. Plan for a break each day.
- Try to arrange for family members to visit at different times throughout the day.

Going home

Begin to ask about going home early in the patient's stay. Try to avoid being caught unprepared. While the patient is in the hospital and before they go home ask these questions:

- Does the patient have any new health problems? Is there anything I need to do?
 - Are there any changes in the regular medication? Are there any side effects I need to watch for? What do I do if I see side effects?
 - Are there any services in the community that might help the patient and myself, such as a Day Program, DARTS, and Meals on Wheels.
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Parking

Monthly hospital parking passes are available at the Parking Office at each hospital. Please go to the Parking Office at the hospital to get the pass and pay for it. The Parking Office at each hospital is open 24 hours a day.

Chedoke Hospital Parking Office	Ext. 77754
Hamilton General Hospital Parking Office	Ext. 42354
Henderson General Hospital Parking Office	Ext. 44060
McMaster University Medical Centre Parking Office	Ext. 76156

Things to bring to the hospital

Storage space on the ward is limited. However, you are encouraged to bring in personal items to support the patient's hospital stay.

Please bring patient's own:

- Comfortable, loose fitting clothing including a dressing gown or robe.
 - Slippers with non-skid soles or shoes.
 - Eye glasses and hearing aid(s) with extra batteries.
 - Dentures and denture supplies.
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- Hairbrush, shaving supplies, deodorant, lotion, shampoo, toothbrush and toothpaste.
- Books, magazines.
- Pictures of family and friends.
- List of telephone numbers of family and friends.

Do not bring:

- Money or valuables.

Medications

Please bring a list of all of your medications, including herbal, over-the-counter and vitamins. If you have any concerns about your medications please discuss this with your nurse, pharmacist and/or doctor.

Cellphones

No cellphones or blackberries can be used in patient care areas. They can be used in the lobby, cafeteria, public hallways and business offices.

Keep cellphones and blackberries 1 meter from any medical device when in these areas. An example of this is when a patient is attached to an IV pump, they are at risk when near a cellphone or blackberry.

Notes:
