Families, whānau, and friends are often the first to notice changes that could mean a person has delirium.

Are they different today? If you notice a change in how the person is acting or thinking , tell the health care team right away.

People with delirium may:

- Be restless and upset, or sleepy and slow to react, or a mixture of both
- Have trouble concentrating and paying attention
- Not make sense
- See and hear imaginary things or believe things that are not real
- Be more confused than is usual for them and not know where they are
- Have symptoms that come and go



Supporting someone with delirium

Seeing a dramatic change in how the person you support thinks and acts can be upsetting. Being with the person and waiting for them to return to their usual self can be a worrying time.

Delirium can cause a person to act out of character. Don't take hurtful or strange things they may say to heart.

The calm presence of a familiar person can be comforting. Reassure them that they are safe and that you are there and want to help.

What the person is experiencing seems real to them. Respond to the emotion rather than argue about the facts.

Speak gently about familiar, pleasant things.

Minimise background noise, such as television. Too much stimulation can add to confusion.

Continue the helpful strategies described in this brochure when you visit.

Look after yourself and get some rest. Remember to eat and drink. If you can, go out for short walks.

Feel free to talk with the health care team and ask any questions or concerns.

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DELIRIUM IN HOSPITAL: HOW FAMILIES, WHĀNAU, AND FRIENDS CAN HELP



Delirium is a temporary state of confusion (or worsened confusion) caused by the brain malfunctioning. The symptoms occur suddenly over a few days or hours. It is a serious and common medical condition.

Delirium is usually temporary, but it can slow healing and recovery. Unfortunately, some people may have long-term effects.

This is why it is important to help prevent delirium and to identify and treat it right away.

Te Whatu Ora
Health New Zealand
Waitaha Canterbury

How you can help prevent delirium

Simple strategies can help reduce the chance of delirium developing while in hospital

1 Share information about the person

- Chances are, no one knows the person you support as well as you do.
- Consider the important things that you think the health care team need to know to help
  - Gain cooperation in personal care activities like having a shower
  - Encourage conversation
  - Support their interests and hobbies
  - Help the person be reassured and settled
- Because you know what is normal for the person you support, let the health care team know if you notice changes.
- If the ward uses a Kowhai Chart to help the health care team get to know the person, you can help to fill this in.



2 Stimulate and remind them

- Activities that the person enjoys are an important part of recovery.
- Visit regularly. Plan an activity or two to do together, such as talking, reading out loud, working on a puzzle, looking at photos, or giving them a hand massage.
- Bring in their favourite music and things to look at or do. Ask if the ward has an activity trolley.
- If the person you support is confused, stay with them as much as possible. Gently remind them of where they are and why, and what is going on.

3 Make sure they wear their glasses, hearing aids, and dentures

4 Encourage them to keep moving

- Find out how active the person you support can be and how you can help with this.
- Encourage the person you support to move and to do as much as they can on their own. This will help them to recover more quickly.
- Encourage them to do exercise 3 times a day, like short walks together or sitting in a chair at mealtimes.
- Bring in safe slippers for walking and any mobility aids that they use, like their walker or walking stick.

5 Help them drink and eat enough

- Many people lose interest in eating when they are ill.
- Check with the team if there is food or drink to avoid.
- Offer drinks that the person likes often.
- Eating together at meal times and bringing snacks can help when people don't have much appetite.
- Tell a staff member if you notice coughing while eating or drinking.

6 Be aware of pain

- If you think the person you support is in pain, let the health care team know so that they can help.

7 Encourage regular sleep

- Encourage the person you support to be doing things during the day, rather than napping a lot.
- Encourage familiar routines and bedtime rituals.
- After 3pm, encourage drinks that don't have caffeine.

