

# Delirium



\*Information taken from The Royal College of Psychiatrists information booklet on delirium and the Alzheimer's Society, UK website\*

## What is Delirium?

Delirium is known as an 'Acute Confusional State' which occurs if someone becomes medically unwell. Delirium is much more common in older people, especially those with dementia

## What are the symptoms of Delirium?

The symptoms of delirium will start suddenly and may come and go over the course of the day. An individual may:

- Be more confused than normal
- Have difficulty following a conversation
- See things/people which aren't there (hallucinations)
- Experience rambling speech
- Be abnormally sleepy or withdrawn \*
- Be asleep during the day but awake all night
- Have moods that change quickly
- Be very agitated or restless and become unable to sit still

\* This is known as 'hypoactive' delirium and can be easily missed or mistaken for depression

## What causes Delirium?

Medical problems, surgery and medication can all cause delirium. Common causes are: **urine or chest infections, pain, side effects of medication, dehydration, high temperature, constipation, or being in an unfamiliar place.** However there is often more than one cause of delirium and sometimes the cause is unknown.

## How is Delirium different to Dementia?

Delirium starts quickly, over a period of hours or days, but dementia does not. The symptoms of delirium will also vary a lot over the day, but those of dementia generally don't (the exception being dementia with Lewy bodies).

## What do I do if I think my relative has Delirium?

If your family member suddenly experiences any of the symptoms described, they need to see a doctor right away. It is important that someone accompanies them to explain that the symptoms are not normal for the person.

## How can I help someone experiencing Delirium?

You can help someone with delirium by making them feel calm and more in control.

- Reassure them of where they are and what is happening
- Talk to them using short simple sentences, repeat sentences if necessary
- Make sure they have their glasses on or hearing aids in if they use them
- Leave a light on at night so they can see where they are if they wake up.
- If they are in hospital bring some familiar items from home or let the staff know any personal information (names, hobbies, significant events). That might help make them feel calm and comforted