

# Delirium in the Emergency Department (ED):

## Things for Caregivers to Know

Delirium is common and usually temporary

You can play an important role for your loved one

Immediately report any sudden changes in behavior or other symptoms of delirium to your healthcare provider

### Reducing the risk of delirium in the ED

1. Try to bring all medications (or a list of all medications) with you to the ED.
2. If possible, bring a medical information sheet that lists all allergies, current physicians, medical conditions and usual pharmacy.
3. Try to bring eyeglasses, hearing aids, dentures and familiar objects to the ED.
4. Help orient your loved one throughout their stay by speaking calmly in a reassuring tone. Explain where they are and why.
5. If giving instructions, keep them simple and state only one task at a time.
6. As much as possible, stay with your loved one in the Emergency Department and/or hospital.
7. Inform the nurse or doctor immediately whenever you notice subtle changes in your loved one.

*Adapted from: Delirium handout for family, Aging Brain Center, Harvard Institute for Aging Research and Delirium brochure by the Care of the Confused Hospitalized*

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### Caring for your loved one with delirium

1. Seeing familiar people is reassuring for people with delirium. Encourage family and friends to visit.
2. When speaking to someone with delirium, use a slow, clear voice. It's helpful to identify yourself and the person (with delirium) by name.
3. Encourage and assist with adequate food and fluid intake.
4. Not knowing the time of day can increase confusion. Open the curtains and remind them where they are and what day and time it is.
5. Visual or hearing impairment can also worsen confusion. Help them put on their hearing aids and glasses if they are normally worn.
6. Do not try to restrain someone with delirium who is agitated or aggressive. Let them walk around but make sure they are safe from fall hazards.
7. When possible, bring personal items that remind your loved one of home (pictures, dressing gown, favorite music).
8. Talk with staff about any special personal information that may help orient your loved one (hobbies, significant events and people in their lives).