



DELIRIUM: A Fact Sheet To Share

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Older adults are vulnerable to delirium which is often mistaken for dementia or a mental illness. Delirium refers to confusion, disorientation, psychosis, bizarre behavior or other unusual dementia-like symptoms resulting from a physical condition or drug interaction/negative drug side effect. The onset of delirium is more sudden than dementia. The hallmark of delirium is a shortened attention span and fluxuation of cognitive abilities.

Delirium is reversible and more common in people who have suffered illness or medication changes, people who have been recently hospitalized and the frail elderly population. Many people do not recognize delirium and the longer a patient remains delirious, the more likely there are to be serious complications. Any sudden dementia, psychosis or bizarre behaviors could be a result of delirium and the person should get immediate medical attention. The person should not be left alone as they may have very impaired judgment and are at greater risk for injury or accidents.