



Dementia Toolkit – Stay safe and well

# Dementia and delirium



**Dementia Toolkit**  
Living your life with hope



## Stay safe and well

### Dementia and delirium

Delirium can occur when people are unwell due to a physical illness such as infection or constipation, or due to a change in their medications. Anyone can experience delirium when they are ill, but it is more common in people with dementia. It is important to know how to recognise delirium so that you can seek medical help and be treated for whatever is making you ill.

In this booklet we:

- hear from a researcher working to improve the experience of dementia and delirium
- tell you how to spot the signs of delirium
- offer some top tips for managing delirium
- link you to further resources

### Understanding dementia and delirium

Our Research and Translation Manager, Catherine, spoke to Professor Louise Allan to understand what delirium is and how it affects people with dementia.

The quote below is taken from this conversation, which you can watch in full on our website.



Louise Allan, Professor of Geriatric Medicine, says

**"It's important to seek medical attention because what needs to be done is checking out what all the possible causes are of the delirium. So for example, examining someone's chest to see if they've got a chest infection, or sending off a urine sample to see if there's any infection in the urine."**



Louise is running a large research study into improving the care people with dementia receive after they have had delirium so that they can make a better recovery.

In the video Louise also mentions John's Campaign, a campaign to allow carers the right to stay with people with dementia in health and care settings.

You can find out more about John's campaign online. Visit:

<https://johnscampaign.org.uk/>

## The signs of delirium

It is important to know the signs of delirium and how these differ from dementia symptoms:

- sudden, rapid changes in confusion or mood
- being a lot less alert or a lot more agitated than usual
- these changes can fluctuate, so someone could seem very up and down in their health from one moment to the next

It may help to think of these changes using the three characteristics below to spot delirium:

**behaviour change – speed of change – irregular change**

Delirium can be treated by addressing the medical problem(s) that have caused it. Don't assume that a change is due to dementia: seek medical help.

## Top tips for managing delirium

- drink plenty of water and eat regularly
- keep a good bedtime routine so you don't disturb your sleep patterns
- make sure you have your glasses and hearing aid (or whatever you need) so that you can see and hear well
- if you are a carer or friend, reassure the person with delirium that you are there to help and remind them of where they are

## Further resources

**Alzheimer's Society** have a page dedicated to understanding delirium and dementia. To view this page visit:

<https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/get-support/daily-living/delirium>

If you would like to watch a 'Patient Delirium Experience' video, where a man talks about his own experience of delirium and recovery, then visit the **European Delirium Association's** website:

[www.europeandeliriumassociation.org/patient-video.html](http://www.europeandeliriumassociation.org/patient-video.html)

This resource is on the internet. Use the camera on your phone or tablet to scan the QR code below to visit the webpage.



# Contact us

We would love to know what you think of the toolkit. We want to improve it based on your feedback.

Please get in touch with us by emailing  
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If you prefer to write to us, then please address your letter to:

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