

Delirium is an acute confusional state that can happen when someone is ill. It is a SUDDEN change over a few hours or days, and tends to vary at different times of day. People may be confused at some times and then seem their normal selves at other times. People who become delirious may start behaving in ways that are unusual for them- they may become more agitated than normal or feel more sleepy and withdrawn.

Non-pharmaceutical measures

- identify and manage the possible underlying cause or combination of causes
- ensure effective communication and reorientation (for example explaining where the person is, who they are, and what your role is) and provide reassurance for people diagnosed with delirium
- consider involving family, friends and carers to help with this
- ensure that people at risk of delirium are cared for by a team of healthcare professionals who are familiar to the person at risk
- avoid moving people within and between wards or rooms unless absolutely necessary
- ensure adequate lighting

Pharmacological measures: first line

- midazolam 2.5mg-5mg SC prn 1-2 hourly
- or**
- lorazepam 500micrograms PO/SL prn 1-2 hourly

Pharmacological measures: second line

Option 1

midazolam 10mg-30mg/24hr via a syringe driver)

and

haloperidol 2.5mg-5mg SC prn 1-2 hourly (1-5mg in the elderly).

Option 2

midazolam 10mg-30mg/24hr via a syringe driver)

and

levomepromazine 12.5-25mg SC prn 2-4 hourly (12.5mg in the elderly)

Management of this symptom, which is distressing for both relatives and staff (patients are usually unaware of what they are doing at this time) can be troublesome. Through use of the medications below, titrated appropriately, this can usually be managed effectively.

- Prevention of delirium better than cure, so meticulous adherence to delirium prevention strategies (orientation, prevention of constipation, management of hypoxia, etc) is essential
- Adoption of daily screening, using Single Question in Delirium (SQiD) and / or 4AT rapid test for delirium (<https://www.the4at.com/>) to detect early and treat cause