

DELIRIUM

Signs & Symptoms of Delirium Distinguished from Depression & Dementia

	Delirium	Depression	Dementia
Onset	Abrupt and acute over hours to days, often with identifiable date onset	May be abrupt or gradual	Gradual and insidious; no specific date of onset
Prognosis	Usually reversible	Varies; usually responds to medication and therapy	Progressive decline over time; most often irreversible
Orientation	Not being oriented to place, others or time occurs early on; rarely disoriented to self	Oriented	Disorientation occurs late in the illness
Memory	Short term memory problems with a sudden onset	May complain of memory problems with recent and remote events	Short term memory problems that become more severe over time
Attention	Very short; unable to attend well	Fluctuates	Usually preserved until advanced stage
Symptom Duration	Fluctuates moment to moment	Relatively short duration with gradual improvement	Long, with worsening of symptoms over time
Thinking & Speech	Incoherent, rambling, irrelevant answers to questions, illogical, disorganized	May be slowed, impaired concentration, but logical	Ability to problem solve becomes more impaired as disease progresses; concrete in thinking process; logical until advanced stages
Level of Consciousness	Clouded, changes within hours; may be hyperalert, lethargic, difficult to arouse, or comatose	Alert	Clouding of consciousness in terminal stage only
Psychomotor Changes	Marked, sudden changes; may show increased or decreased motor activity	May show gradual increase in motor activity related to restlessness, anxiety, or motor slowing	Gradual slowing of motor activity in late stages
Sleep	Disturbed sleep patterns that vary hour to hour	Difficulty falling to sleep, difficulty staying asleep, early morning waking; occasionally excessive sleep	Disturbed sleep patterns, but does not fluctuate hour to hour
Mood	Rapid fluctuations hour to hour; labile	Depressed, anxious, irritable	Stable; irritable/agitated when under stress or with change
Symptom Variation to Time of Day	Fluctuates throughout the day; symptoms may seem worse during the evening and night due to lack of sleep and/or "sundowning"	Patients often complain of feeling worse in the morning	"Sundowning" is common; increased agitation with change in routine or when tired