



NEUROCOGNITIVE DISORDERS

DELIRIUM

What it is:

Delirium is characterised by a disturbance in an individual's awareness of their environment, ability to focus and shift attention, and confused thoughts. There are a number of different types of delirium – medication-induced delirium, substance-withdrawal delirium, delirium due to another medical condition, or delirium due to multiple aetiologies. The disturbances in attention, awareness and thought develop over a short period of time, usually between a few hours to a few days. The disturbances can also fluctuate during the course of the day, and are typically worse during night time. Delirium often occurs in the context of a pre-existing neurocognitive disorder, as the impaired brain functionality of an individual with mild and major neurocognitive disorder (also known as dementia) may make them more susceptible to delirium.

Delirium can affect short term memory and language capabilities, as well as leading to disorientation with regards to time and place. Delirium can also cause the individual to experience hallucinations or illusions. A disturbance in the sleep-wake cycle is also a common associated symptom of delirium, with the individual sleeping too much, too little, or experiencing a complete reversal of the night-day sleep cycle. An individual with delirium may also experience extreme shifts in emotional states, such as anxiety, depression, irritability, fear and anger or euphoria.

Common symptoms:

1. A reduced ability to focus or maintain attention
2. A reduced awareness and orientation of the individuals environment
3. The disturbance in attention and awareness develops over a short period of time, typically a few hours or days
4. The disturbance in attention and awareness is a change from the individuals normal functionality
5. Confused thoughts
6. Memory deficit, especially short term memory
7. Decrease in language capabilities
8. Disturbances in the sleep-wake pattern

9. Disorientation



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Causes:

There are a number of medical conditions, as well as medications and substances that could potentially cause delirium. Both mild and major neurocognitive disorders, such as Alzheimer's disease, increase the risk of delirium, especially in older individuals. Intoxication or withdrawal from substances such as alcohol, cannabis, phencyclidine, inhalants, opioids, sedatives, cocaine, hallucinogens and sedatives can also potentially lead to delirium.