

What is delirium?

Delirium (duh-leer-ee-um) is a change in your baby's behavior caused by changes in how their brain works. This can happen in babies who are in the hospital, even for 1 day. Delirium:

- Can happen to babies during their NICU stay.
- Will get better:
 - As your baby's condition improves.
 - As they get normal sleep.
 - As they are able to be as active as they can.
- Is temporary (short-term).

What are the possible symptoms?

If your baby has delirium, they may:

- Seem anxious, agitated or restless.
- Pull at lines, breathing tubes and wires.
- Have trouble paying attention to your face, toys or other things around them.
- Not be comforted with usual soothing.
- Sleep too little or too much, during the day or night.

These symptoms may:

- Come and go.
- Get better or worse for a period of time.
- Happen even if your baby does not have delirium.

Talk with your baby's care team if you notice any symptoms.

What causes delirium?

Delirium in the NICU is caused by changes in your baby's brain function (how it works). This may be due to:

- Side effects from medicines (such as those needed to help keep your baby safe and comfortable).
- Not being able to move around.
- Not having a normal sleep schedule.
- Severe (very bad) illness.

How can delirium be prevented?

Your baby's care team is committed to the best care for your baby. The team cannot fully prevent delirium and cannot say who will or will not have it.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.

Delirium in the NICU, continued

Talk with the care team about what is best for your baby. In general, they will:

- **Treat the illness** causing the delirium.
- **Check for delirium.** If your baby is in the NICU for more than 2 days and 2 nights, the nurses will check your baby for signs of delirium in the afternoon and during the night.
- **Give day and night sleep support.**
 - During the day, blinds are open and lights are on.
 - During the night, it is kept dark and quiet.
 - The nurse will still check on your baby, such as to check their I.V. lines, but they will stay as quiet as possible.
- **Avoid certain tasks during sleep time.**
 - This may include baths, weight checks and linen changes.
 - Sometimes, a quick clean-up or linen change may be needed, but the team limits this as much as possible.
- **Remove any tubes or wires that are not needed.**
- **Help your baby to be active.** The NICU team may help with safe movement, daily routines and talking with your baby. When your baby is ready, other teams may start working with them. This may include:
 - Child Life
 - Physical Therapy (PT)
 - Occupational Therapy (OT)
 - Speech Therapy (ST)
- **Give pain medicine as needed to help keep your baby comfortable.** If your baby is stable, they will have a “holiday” (small break) from their pain medicine every day. This helps prevent too much pain medicine from building up in their system.
- **Ask Child Life** to use play or other activities to help relieve stress, fear and anxiety.
- **Decrease loud noises and bright lights that are in in your baby’s eyes.**
- **May give medicine that could help your baby rest and feel calm.**

What can I do to help?

How you can help may change from day to day. It depends on how your baby is improving or if they need more rest. Some guidelines for helping your baby are listed below.

- **Be with your baby as often and for as long as you can.** Your presence is comfort for your baby.
- **Be calm and comfort your baby.**

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Delirium in the NICU, continued

- **Help your baby know whether it is day or night.**
 - If there is a window, open blinds by 9 a.m.
 - Turn on lights during the day.
 - Close blinds at night. Turn off lights and TV.
 - Avoid phone calls during sleep time.
 - Do not place music or sound machines in your baby's bed. Limit the sound level to prevent later hearing problems.
 - Please let your baby's care team know if they are being too noisy.
- **Use familiar items and routines.**
 - During the day, you may read to your baby or play music. This may help distract them.
 - You may bring blankets, stuffed animals or toys from home.
- **Ask how you can help with your baby's care.** Talk with the team about how you can help care for your baby. This may include:
 - Checking your baby's temperature.
 - Changing their diaper.
 - Giving them a bath.

This teaching sheet contains general information only. Talk with your child's doctor or a member of your child's healthcare team about specific care of your child.

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