



**York Teaching Hospital**  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Post-operative confusion

Information for patients, relatives and carers

① For more information, please contact:

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The York Hospital  
Wigginton Road, York, YO31 8HE

Tel: 01904 721758

Caring with pride

## Introduction

After surgery, some people may experience confusion, also known as 'delirium'. This leaflet gives you some brief information on what may cause this and how our patients can prepare for it.

## What is post-operative confusion?

People experience post-operative confusion in a number of different ways. Some typical symptoms include;

- Seeing and hearing things differently
- Disorganised thinking
- Changeable emotions from tearfulness to anger
- Disrupted sleep
- Loss of memory

Not everyone develops post-operative confusion. For those who do, it can vary in length and intensity from person to person. However, it is usually temporary.

Post-operative confusion can be frightening for patients. We will look after people with care, compassion and professionalism.

**If you (or a relative/friend) recognise any of these symptoms it is important to let your nurse or GP know about them so they can help.**

## **Why does post-operative confusion develop?**

A number of things may cause confusion, including;

- Medication
- Stress
- Lack of sleep
- Infection
- Pain
- Malnutrition/dehydration
- The change in environment

## **What increases the risk of post-operative confusion?**

Some health conditions and lifestyle choices may increase the likelihood of post-operative confusion developing. These can include;

- Memory and cognition disorders
- Sensory impairment
- Advanced age
- High alcohol intake, so please inform us as early as possible if this might to apply to you
- Depression

## What can you do to help?

There are a few simple things that you can do to reduce the risk of developing post-operative confusion or minimise the effect if it does happen.

Arrange visits from family and friends if possible.



Bring in glasses, dentures and hearing aids.



Bring in a familiar item from home.



Bring in a simple clock so you can see the time, and possibly a calendar.



If you enjoy music bring in a personal music player.



If you enjoy reading, puzzles or crosswords bring them with you to help you keep mentally active.



Keep your mobile phone so you can stay in contact with your relatives and friends.



It is important to eat and drink as soon as you feel able to.



It is important to keep moving and work with the physiotherapists while you are in hospital.



Bring earplugs, eye masks or something that will help you sleep. The hospital can be noisy at night.



## Who can I talk to?

Post-operative confusion is sometimes missed. If you think you or your relative/friend is experiencing (or has experienced) post-operative confusion it is important to talk to someone.

**When in hospital:** You can speak to the ward staff looking after you.

**When at home:** Speak to your GP who will be able to provide further support.

## **Tell us what you think of this leaflet**

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact:  
The Perioperative Medicine Service, The York Hospital,  
Wigginton Road, York, YO31 8HE, telephone  
01904 721758 or email [periop@york.nhs.uk](mailto:periop@york.nhs.uk)

## **Teaching, Training and Research**

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

## **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)**

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email [pals@york.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@york.nhs.uk).

An answer phone is available out of hours.

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