

Address Medical Problems: Your Body and Brain Work Together

During times of illness, the brain does not work well. Sometimes this can be serious enough to cause *delirium*, which is also known as “acute brain failure.” Some medical problems can cause trouble with thinking if they are not well managed.

Infections – may cause weakness, loss of appetite, or confusion. Most infections (such as pneumonia and urinary tract infections) can be easily found and treated.

High blood pressure – may cause you to feel dizzy or lower your ability to concentrate or think clearly. Blood pressure can easily be checked, and there are safe treatments.

Dehydration – may make you feel dizzy, weak, or confused. Not drinking enough liquids or fluids, especially in hot weather, can lead to dehydration. This can lower blood pressure, or cause problems with the chemical balance in the bloodstream.

Nutrition problems – can result in fatigue or confusion. Lab tests can find the source of the problem, which may be a serious shortage of certain vitamins.

Diabetes – can result in blood sugar levels that are too low or too high, which can prevent focusing or thinking clearly. Our bodies and brains require the right amount of sugar to function. Other effects of diabetes may be feeling weak, tired or confused.

Thyroid Problems – can cause problems with focus or thinking, from low levels of thyroid hormone (hypothyroid) or high levels (hyperthyroid).

Anemia – is a decrease in the total amount of red blood cells in the blood, which may occur from injury, bleeding or vitamin deficiency. When it comes on slowly, the symptoms are often hard to identify, and may include feeling tired, weakness, shortness of breath, or decreased ability to exercise. Anemia that comes on quickly often has more symptoms, including confusion.

Pain – often distracts our mind and interferes with our ability to think clearly. Many medications may help pain, but have unwanted side effects of sleepiness or confusion.

What you can do:

- Contact your health care provider if you notice rapid (days to weeks) changes in thinking or memory
- Keep your medical appointments, bring your medicines (or an updated list) to your visit, and talk with your provider about your test results
- Check your blood pressure and blood sugar and keep a log book
- Eat healthy, drink plenty of water, limit caffeine and alcohol, get enough rest and find ways to manage your stress

