



BRAIN HEALTH

Your brain health includes your memory, thinking, and behavior.

- Your brain health can *change* slowly or suddenly.
- **Cognitive Impairment** is a *slow* loss of memory and thinking over months or years.
- **Dementia** refers to a *severe* form of cognitive impairment.
- **Delirium** is a *new and sudden change* in your memory or thinking.



Cognitive impairment can increase the risk of delirium after surgery.

- Delirium is very common among older patients undergoing surgery.
- Delirium can lead to a higher chance of other complications, longer hospital stay, and an increased need for nursing care and rehabilitation.
- Delirium can be caused by dehydration, medications, infection, immobility, and inability to sleep.
- Delirium prevention is a priority for your care team and can be *prevented*.

Brain health can affect your ability to understand and make decisions about your surgery – here’s how to talk about it with your care team.

- Ask your care team to provide simple explanations in clear language.
- Ask what type of anesthesia will be administered and whether there are any possible complications that could affect your cognition during recovery.
- Ask your care team to perform a cognitive evaluation before surgery to serve as a baseline for your mental health and function.
- If you do not fully understand your surgical procedure, ask your surgeon to explain as many times as necessary.
- Remind your surgeon about your values and wishes, and any goals you have for what you want out of your surgery.
- Be sure that the surgery team includes you or your primary caregiver in all discussions.

What to do *before* surgery.

- Discuss any personal history of cognitive impairment, dementia, or delirium with your care team.
- Provide a complete list of all medications that you take on a regular basis to review with your care team.
- Think about what you are going to need after surgery and plan accordingly with your family, such as arranging for after-care services if needed.
- Ensure your caregiver understands your values and wishes so that they can advocate for you during your stay in the hospital.

How to prepare for your recovery *after* surgery.

- Make sure your eyeglasses, hearing aids, and other personal sensory equipment will be returned to you as soon as possible following your surgery.
- Bring familiar items from home, such as photographs of your family, to place in your room.
- Bring a calendar to place in your room so you know what day it is.
- Ask to be placed in a recovery room with a window so you know whether it is day or night.



Delirium can occur after surgery, but you and your loved ones can help us prevent that.

Your loved ones may also notice signs of delirium such as **confusion**, **restlessness**, or **inability to think clearly** after you have undergone surgery. Let your loved ones know that it is okay to talk to your doctor or nurse if they are concerned about these things after surgery.