

**Taking Charge: Good Medical Care for the Elderly
and How to Get It**

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APPENDIX C

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Appendix C

Diagnosing Delirium and Its Underlying Causes

Because delirium can be fatal if the underlying causes are untreated and because an inappropriate diagnosis of dementia may result in failure to treat those underlying causes, it is imperative that delirium and its causes be detected. The following checklist will help you ensure that all diagnostic tests are done. Make sure that you put a copy of this checklist in the three-ring binder in which you are building your loved one's medical history.

*STANDARD
DIAGNOSTIC TESTS—
UNEXPLAINED DELIRIUM*

Complete blood count

- Anemia
- Infection

Electrolyte levels

- High or low levels of potassium or sodium
- Dehydration
- Renal (kidney) failure
- Endocrinopathy
- Acidosis

Blood chemistry panel

- Hypercalemia or hypocalcemia
- Hypoglycemia or hypoglycemia
- Liver dysfunction
- Renal (kidney) failure

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Urinalysis

- Infection

Electrocardiogram

- Myocardial infarction
- Arrhythmias

Chest X ray

- Pneumonia
- Congestive heart failure

CT Scan

- Cerebrovascular accident

The above are diagnostic tests for the more common conditions causing delirium. If these tests do not establish a diagnosis, the following tests may be applicable, if justified by the findings of the history and the physical examination and also by the clinical situation:

Blood culture

- Sepsis

Cardiac isoenzyme levels

- Myocardial infarction
- Hypoxia

Arterial blood gases

- Acidosis
- Thyrotoxicosis

Appendices

Thyroid function tests

- Hypothyroidism

Toxicology screen

- Drug intoxication

Drug levels

- Drug toxicity

Lumbar puncture

- Meningitis

Electroencephalogram

- Seizures