

HALO & WINGS

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Welcome to the seventh edition of *Halo & Wings*. Winter is done and spring is sprung. The year moves ahead into hay fever season and then the heat of summer. As summer heats up, often we need to be reminded to

increase our water intake. Not drinking enough water leads to dehydration that can then lead to illness. The illness can be a minor feeling of being unwell to a more serious condition requiring hospitalisation, often affecting a person's behaviour. This edition discusses various conditions including dehydration that can affect behaviour.



As *Halo & Wings* can cover many topics, if you would like information on any health issues in particular or if you would like to contribute to future editions, please contact Gabrielle Charlesworth; contact details are on page 2.

Skin Conditions

There are many types of skin conditions. As skin conditions are often uncomfortable, itchy and at times painful, the person suffering from them can become irritable, even aggressive at times. Let's discuss three conditions; cellulitis, scabies and shingles.

Cellulitis can be recognised by swelling, reddening of the skin, skin is warm to touch and painful. Cellulitis mostly occurs on the lower leg and also can be found in areas of trauma, surrounding an ulcer or broken skin. A person with cellulitis may develop a fever, chills and/or sweats. Cellulitis is caused by bacteria and is not contagious.



Scabies is an infectious skin disease caused by an invisible mite. It is spread via direct contact. Scabies occurs in the creases and crevices of the body, not on the head or face in the elderly. There is intensive itchiness at the infected site with a thread like tunnel that forms under the skin.



Shingles is an infectious viral condition that is also responsible for chickenpox. A rash appears on the waist line, side of the torso or face. Shingles is itchy and painful, often causing shooting and/or stabbing pains. A person with shingles may develop a fever, chills and/or headache. After a few days, a band or patch of red dots appears, developing into round, fluid filled blisters.



Delirium in the elderly - some causes

Delirium is an acute confused state. Delirium is a medical condition that results in confusion and other disruptions in thinking and behaviour, including changes in perception, attention, mood and activity level.* The onset is sudden and the person can be disorientated and display aggression, physical and/or verbal, as compared to dementia that has a slow, subtle onset.

Delirium in the elderly can be caused by: a Urinary Tract Infection (UTI); chest infection; brain infection; constipation; and/or dehydration. When an elderly person becomes suddenly confused, disorientated, aggressive or all three, UTI and chest infection are the first conditions to consider.

UTI is an infection of the urinary tract that consists of the kidney, bladder and ureter. Symptoms are: burning sensation; urgency; frequency; urge, no urine; leaking urine; offensive odour; dark, cloudy urine; blood in the urine; fever; disorientation; confusion; and aggression.

Dehydration is one of the most common causes of UTI in the elderly. Drinking water is to be encouraged. If the person does not like water, add a little cordial for flavour.

Chest infection in the elderly that causes delirium is usually pneumonia. Pneumonia is not easy to detect. Symptoms are: coughing; shortness of breath; the breath will smell different; confusion; and/or aggression.

Pneumonia can be caused by a decrease in body function, that is, the inability to clear the throat of phlegm and the inability to clear germs from the lung by coughing.

People who are bed bound and/or have a low immunity are most at risk of a chest infection.

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* www.alz.org/norcal/in_my_community_17590.asp

Delirium (continued)

Brain infection can be another cause of delirium in the elderly. Some brain infections can occur at any age. The two most common are meningitis and encephalitis.

Meningitis is a viral or fungal infection that is uncommon.

Encephalitis is usually bacterial and also can be a viral infection.

Both infections can be fatal in the elderly.

Symptoms common to both brain infections are: sudden fever; severe headaches; stiff neck; nausea; vomiting; seizures; confusion; disorientation; drowsiness; sensitivity to light; and poor appetite.

Other common factors include: some forms are contagious; transferred by contact body fluids; sharing of eating utensils; and drinking from the same cup or mug.

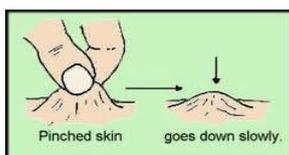
Constipation can occur due to a decrease in bowel function as a person ages. Constipation leads to: a build-up of toxins; confusion; disorientation; faecal impaction; and in extreme cases can lead to delirium.

Dehydration can occur in the elderly as they do not feel thirst as easily. Due to a decline in kidney function in the elderly, they are not able to release toxins effectively.

Symptoms of dehydration are: overall weakness and feeling of being unwell; sleepiness or irritability; unable to pass urine or only small amounts; and minimal to no tears when crying. More severe symptoms are: shortness of breath; seizures; low blood pressure; stomach bloating; severe cramping; and muscle contractions.

Dehydration may lead to: UTI; constipation; heart disease; poor mobility; bladder cancer; and death. Being well hydrated can prevent all the conditions above.

A simple test for dehydration is the gentle pinch test as shown below.



September Health Calendar

According to the Charity Days Event Calendar, September has many days regarding health. Instead of choosing one health concern to discuss in length, following is a list of days and events to bring to our attention the various health concerns.

- ✚ 1 Sep - Gold Bow Day, The Australian Thyroid Foundation
- ✚ 1 Sep - Big Red Kidney Week, Kidney Health Australia
- ✚ 1-30 Sep - Prostate Cancer Awareness Month
- ✚ 1-30 Sep - Heart Foundation Doorknock Appeal
- ✚ 5 Sep - Cancer Council Walk to Work Day
- ✚ 12 Sep - R U OK? Day
- ✚ 16-22 Sep - Herbal Medicine Week
- ✚ 21 Sep - World Alzheimer's Day
- ✚ 28 Sep - World Heart Day.

Considering these events, Archangel has two recommendations:

- ✚ if you have any concerns such as new lumps and bumps or you feel unwell, see your doctor
- ✚ attend a yearly medical check with your GP.

A reminder for Leaders

When your schedule is busy and there are people in your care to take to medical appointments, support is a phone call away.

Archangel can assist, on a casual or ongoing basis, such as taking a Community Member to the doctor or being an advocate for the Community Member while they are in hospital.

Archangel can provide piece of mind and support to the carers in a Community.

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