

# Delirium after surgery linked to dementia

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Elderly patients who suffer from confusion after an operation are three times as likely to go on to develop dementia, a study suggests.

Delirium after surgery appears to be an early warning sign of emerging problems with thinking, scientists say.

It remains unclear if the delirium hastens the onset of dementia or whether people whose brains are already declining are more likely to suffer it. Up to half of elderly patients are thought to suffer from symptoms such as confusion, disorganised thinking or erratic mental states while in hospital.

Researchers at the Mayo Clinic in the United States looked at 1,200 patients over 65 who were cognitively normal before surgery and returned for checks about a year later. A third of the 4 per cent who had suffered from delirium after their operation had developed such problems, compared with 9 per cent of those who did not, according to results published in the *British Journal of Anaesthesia*.

Professor Juraj Sprung, who led the study, said: "We don't yet know whether taking steps to prevent post-operative delirium could also help prevent dementia but we need to find out."

More than 200,000 people a year in Britain develop dementia with no cure

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