

Altered Mental Status

Aliases

Altered level of consciousness

Confusion

Patient Care Goals

1. Identify treatable causes
2. Perform appropriate assessment and diagnostics (e.g., oxygen saturation, glucose check, monitor)
3. Protect patient from complications of altered mental status (e.g., respiratory failure, shock, cardiopulmonary arrest)

Patient Presentation

Inclusion Criteria

Impaired decision-making capacity

Exclusion Criteria

Traumatic brain injury

Patient Management

Assessment

Look for treatable causes of altered mental status (AMS):

1. Airway: Make sure airway remains patent; reposition patient as needed
2. Breathing: Look for respiratory depression; check SPO₂, EtCO₂, and CO detector readings
3. Circulation: Look for signs of poor perfusion
4. Glasgow Coma Score and/or AVPU
5. Pupils
6. Head and neck: Evaluate for signs of trauma
7. Neck: Rigidity or pain with range of motion
8. Stroke assessment tool including focal neurologic findings
9. Blood glucose level
10. EKG or cardiac monitor: arrhythmia limiting perfusion
11. Breath odor: Possible unusual odors include alcohol, acidosis, ammonia
12. Chest/Abdominal: Intra-thoracic hardware, assist devices, abdominal pain or distention, signs of trauma
13. Extremities/skin: Track marks, hydration, edema, dialysis shunt, temperature to touch (or if able, use a thermometer), signs of trauma
14. Signs of infection: Fever, cough, skin changes, dysuria
15. Environment: Survey for pills, paraphernalia, substance use, medication patches, medical devices, ambient temperature, social indicators of neglect, carbon monoxide exposures, multiple casualties with same complaint

Treatment and Interventions

1. Oxygen [Refer to [Universal Care Guideline](#)]
2. Glucose [Refer to [Hypoglycemia Guideline](#) or [Hyperglycemia Guideline](#)]