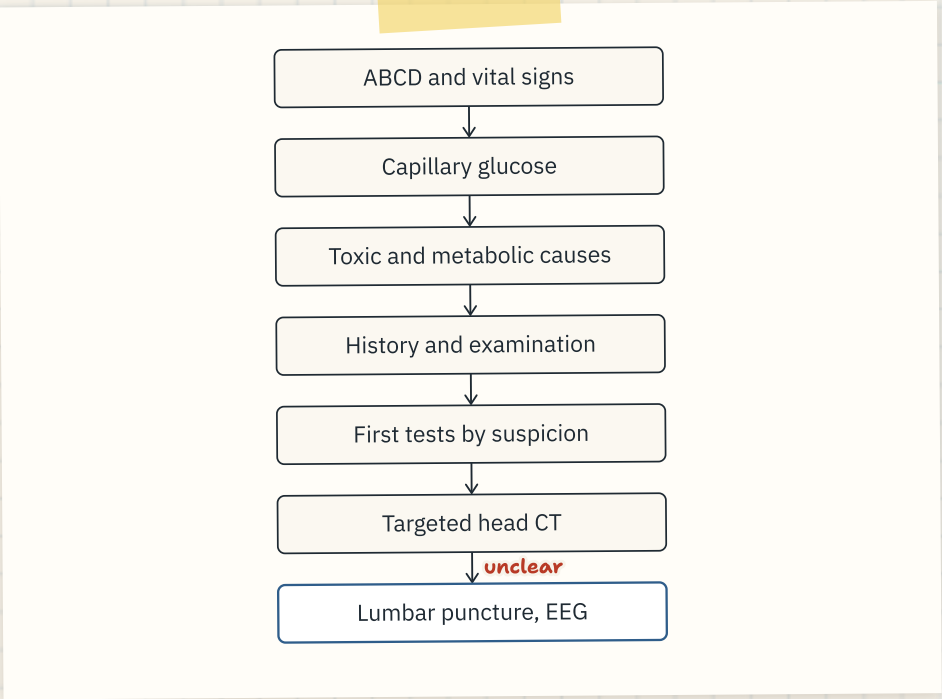
Altered mental status: the order

What to do first, and what can wait



Step by step

1. ABCD, Glasgow Coma Scale, full vital signs
2. Capillary glucose in every patient
3. Reversible toxic and metabolic causes
4. History, examination, medications
5. First tests by suspicion
6. Targeted head CT, then lumbar puncture and EEG if unclear

Pattern	First move
Slow breathing, pinpoint pupils	Naloxone and ventilation
Low glucose	IV dextrose, or glucagon if no IV
At risk of Wernicke	Thiamine with or before dextrose
Fever with stiff neck	Cultures and antibiotics now; CT, then lumbar puncture
Trauma, anticoagulant, new seizure, focal deficit	Non-contrast head CT

Pattern to first move

Rule of thumb

Fix what kills in minutes first

Test by suspicion, never a kitchen sink

Exam traps

- ! Do not reach for the head CT first.
- ! A normal CT does not exclude everything.
- ! Thiamine goes with, or before, dextrose in an at-risk patient.

Altered mental status workup: the initial six steps

Video, written lesson, practice question and sources: medservatory.com/usmle-step-2-ck/emergency-acute-care/altered-mental-status-initial-workup

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