

Physical Therapy in the Intensive Care Unit



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Role of PT in the ICU

Physical therapists help patients move to prevent weakness maximize physical function. This helps to reduce the negative effects of laying in bed for long periods of time. Some of our common goals are to improve:

- Bed positioning and mobility
- Strength
- Range of motion
- Transfers
- Standing and walking
- Balance
- Endurance
- Self-care

Physical therapists also help recommend appropriate medical equipment and devices for hospital and home use.

Benefits of exercise and mobility in the ICU

Research has shown many benefits for providing physical therapy to patients in the ICU setting. Performing exercise and participating in early mobility can lead to:

- Improved physical function
- Improve functional strength
- Stronger respiratory muscles
- Reduce days on ventilator
- Improved quality of life
- Decreased hospital and ICU length of stay



Is PT safe?

- Physical therapists work with doctors, respiratory therapists, and other members of the ICU team during therapy and walking sessions to keep the patient as safe as possible.
- Many research trials have shown that less than 1 in 100 patients exercising or walking while in the ICU experience serious medical complications.



Other important members of the ICU Team

Occupational Therapists:

- Assist patients and caregivers with personal care activities such as bathing, feeding, and grooming.

Speech Therapists:

- Assist patients who have difficulty communicating or swallowing.

Respiratory Therapists:

- Monitor and assist patients who have difficulty breathing

Case Manager:

- Assist patients and families with plans and services that may be needed upon discharge from the hospital.

Medical Team:

- The doctors and nurses that oversee the medical care of the patient within the ICU

What can family and caregivers do to help?

- Do not be afraid to ask questions! Our therapists are happy to explain what to expect, the rationale, and the goals of each therapy, exercise, or mobility session.
- Be an active participant! Physical therapists can often teach families useful positioning tips and helpful exercises that can benefit patients between therapy sessions!

