

Intensive Care Unit (ICU): What You Can Do for Your Loved One



Appoint a family spokesperson to serve as the link between the ICU team and family members. This helps protect your loved one's privacy and saves time for nurses. You can also help make your loved one's family members feel more comfortable. Talk with the nurse to find out what you can do. Your loved one may need rest most of all. And don't forget to take care of yourself, too.



Providing comfort

Your loved one may seem confused, forgetful, excited, or angry. They may not recognize you. This is common for people in the ICU. It may be from medicine, new surroundings, or the illness or trauma itself. You can help by reminding them what day and time it is. Talk about pleasant things, such as family events. When they feel better, bring a magazine or newspaper to share. Or put your loved one's favorite music on your phone and bring headphones.

Giving personal care

Just being with your loved one is important, but you can also help in other ways. Check with the healthcare provider first about:

- Brushing or combing your loved one's hair
- Putting a cool cloth on their forehead
- Rubbing lotion on their dry skin
- Bringing older children to visit

Working with the ICU team

Make sure the provider has the name and phone number of the family spokesperson. When you have questions or concerns, talk with the healthcare team. Sometimes it's helpful to write down both the questions and answers in a notebook. Forgetting is easy when you are under stress. Studies have shown that frequent family visits help lower a person's anxiety and confusion in the ICU. These visits can make the person feel more secure while they're in the ICU.

Taking care of yourself

Remember, your health is important, too. This can be a very stressful time for you. Finding ways to manage your stress is important. If your loved one is sleeping, take a break and go for a walk. Or find a peaceful place to sit, and breathe deeply for a few minutes.

Don't forget to eat healthy foods, such as fruits and vegetables. When you're tired, rest or nap awhile. And arrange with family members to visit in shifts. That way, everyone can get enough rest.

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