

Need to Know for Patients and Families

*What patients
and their
families need to
know before
hospitalization
or a nursing
home admission*

Maintaining Physical Function

Definition: Physical function refers to the ability to eat, bathe, dress, walk, climb stairs, and take medications. Functional decline refers to a change in function causing dependency or inability to carry out one or more of these activities.

Why Is It Important? Maintaining function during a hospital or nursing home stay is crucial to healing and medical/surgical recovery. Functional decline is common during hospital and nursing home stays; returning to one's previous functional level may take time. For every day spent in bed it can take two-and-half days to regain the strength to walk. Prevention of negative outcomes that may occur during a hospital or nursing home stay due to functional decline, such as falls, pressure injuries or tears on the skin, joint pain, or respiratory, or circulatory issues is crucial. Efforts to maintain function are important!

What You Can Do:

1. Take part in your own or your family member/friend's care. Talk with the health care team about:
 - Function overall, the ability to walk, eat, dress, bathe, use the bathroom, climb stairs, and take medications
 - Activity that is safe while in the hospital or nursing home.
 - Realistic discharge goals, including appropriate living situation, health plan, and assistance arranged as needed
2. Request help to remain as functional and active as possible:
 - Get up in the chair for meals
 - Sit at the sink and bathe and/or shower
 - Use the bathroom
 - Walk in the hallIf you are unable to do these things, ask about simple exercises in bed.
3. Be safe. Ask for help. Don't get up alone! Wear sturdy footwear.
4. Tubes (e.g. intravenous tubes) can limit movement. Ask when tubes be removed.
5. Keep your mind active with music, movies, TV, and puzzles.
6. Maintain good food and fluid intake. Talk with the dietitian for food options if you don't see something you like.
7. Get a good night's sleep. Avoid sleeping pills. Let the nurse manager know if noise at night is a problem. Earplugs may be helpful.
8. Make sure glasses, hearing aids and other important items are where you need them.