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## Staying active in hospital

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### Summary

- During your stay in the hospital, you are encouraged to stay active.
  - Always follow hospital staff advice about what you can do safely on your own.
  - For activities such as showering, getting dressed, eating your meals or walking to the toilet, you may need staff assistance or supervision.
  - Ask for help if you need it, especially on days when you are not feeling well.
  - Staying physically and mentally active can help you recover faster and reduce the chance of problems when you go home.
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It is important to look after yourself and to keep active as much as possible while you are in hospital. Moving around – whether in or out of bed – helps to strengthen your muscles and keep your body strong and healthy. Regardless of your age, physical ability or health condition, there is generally something you can do to improve your movement.

Staying physically and mentally active can help you recover faster and reduce the chance of problems when you go home. It is important that you ask for advice from staff about what you are capable of doing safely and follow their instructions.

If you don't try to maintain your ability to move around and to look after yourself, it can slow your recovery and make your hospital stay longer. Losing the ability and confidence to look after yourself can also mean losing your independence, either because you need more support or because you cannot return to where you were living.

### Importance of staying active for older people in hospital

It is especially important for older people to stay active and mobile in hospital, because their ability to do everyday activities can decline as early as the second day of being admitted.

During your stay in the hospital, the staff will encourage you to stay active. Moving around – whether in or out of bed – helps to strengthen your muscles and keep your body strong.

Being active can:

- reduce your risk of falls
- improve how well you sleep
- decrease pain and disability from arthritis
- prevent pressure injuries (also called bed sores)
- avoid bone weakness and muscle shrinkage
- improve blood flow and prevent clots
- increase your energy and endurance
- improve your mental wellbeing.

### Tips for staying active in hospital

Always follow hospital staff advice about what you can do safely on your own.

Remember to:

- Talk to hospital staff about what you can do safely on your own and which activities you may need staff to help with.
  - Ask for help if you need it, especially on days when you are not feeling well. Remember, recovering from
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illness or surgery takes time, and you may need more help with walking and getting to the bathroom than you realise.

- Make sure you can reach the nursing call bell beside your bed and use it to call for help.
- If you need assistance with moving or walking, call for help before you try to get out of bed.

For activities such as showering, getting dressed, eating your meals or walking to the toilet, you may need staff assistance or supervision. Feel confident about asking for help. Hospital staff are there to help you with these things.

Take part in physical and rehabilitation activities provided in hospital. These activities can help you recover faster.

Tell hospital staff if you are in pain. Managing your pain will help you get better.

If you feel confident about your movement and stability, try to do as much as you can for yourself. It is important to stay as independent as possible.

### **Staying active in hospital can improve health and confidence**

Little things you do during your stay in hospital can make a big difference to your physical and mental health.

Physical activities include:

- Walk around the ward every few hours, if you can. If you have been told not to walk by yourself or without supervision, then arrange to walk with a visitor or staff member.
- If the doctor has recommended that you stay in bed, change your position every one to two hours, and move your legs and ankles. You can ask staff to help you do this.
- If you spend long periods of time in bed, ask the staff to raise the headrest and knee support to put you in a more seated position, rather than lying flat.
- Sit out of bed as soon as possible and as often as possible. Change your position when you are sitting too.
- Eat meals sitting out of bed if you are able.
- If possible, get dressed each morning in normal day clothes and comfortable, flat shoes.
- Always use your walking frame, walking stick or other mobility aid if one has been recommended.

Mental activities include:

- Read magazines or books or, if you are not up to reading, listen to audio books or podcasts.
- Write letters or a journal or begin another writing activity.
- Bring an easy, uncluttered craft to do, such as knitting or cross-stitch.
- Do word or number puzzles such as crosswords or sudoku).
- Talk to friends, listen to music or a podcast, or use your laptop or tablet device (electrical equipment may need to be checked before you can use it – ask your nurse about this).

Routine activities include:

- Eat regular meals and snacks, and try to drink plenty of water (unless your doctor has told you not to).
- To avoid dizziness, take your time to slowly get up from lying to sitting, and then sitting to standing, and sit out of bed to let your body get used to being upright.
- Try to go to the toilet as you normally would.
- Check your skin every day for redness, swelling or soreness. Ask for help from staff if you need it.
- If you notice any changes in your eating, toileting or skin, let your doctor or nurse know.
- Wash your hands, especially before eating and after going to the toilet.

### **Where to get help**

- Your doctor
- Nursing staff
- Allied health staff
- Patient liaison officer

**This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:**

National Ageing Research Institute (NARI)

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