

# Sedation in the Intensive Care Unit: What You Need to Know

## General Information

Patients who are in the Intensive Care Unit can become anxious or restless. Illness, stress, medicines, and being in an unfamiliar place can add to these feelings.

There are several things the health care team can do to calm (sedate) your loved one if he or she becomes anxious. Options include:

- reassuring pats on the hand
- using a soft voice
- using soothing music
- giving your loved one medicine.

## Why is Sedation Needed?

When patients become too upset, this puts extra stress on their bodies. Their hearts and lungs need to work harder and tire faster than they would normally.

Patients may hurt themselves (or others) by trying to get out of bed, pull out tubes or lines, or striking (hitting) out. All of these actions can increase the time it takes for patients to get better.

When patients are sedated, they have more energy to get better and they feel less anxious.

## What Kind of Medicines are Used?

Medicines that are most often used for sedation are:

- lorazepam (Ativan®)
- midazolam (Versed®)
- propofol (Diprivan®)
- morphine (Roxicodone®, OxyIR®, OxyContin®), hydromorphone (Dilaudid®) or fentanyl (Duragesic®) may be given for pain
- haloperidol (Haldol®) or quetiapine (Seroquel®) may be given for agitation.

Members of the health care team can tell you which medicine(s) your loved one may need.

## How Much Medicine is Needed?

It can be difficult to predict how much medicines your loved one will need.

The nurses caring for your loved one will want to give enough medicine to reduce the extra stress but keep him or her alert.

Your loved one will receive the least amount of medicine for the shortest time possible.

Together, your loved one's level of anxiety and health will determine how much medicine is needed and for long. He or she may need to be put into a heavy sleep to calm down and help the healing.

## How Long is Sedation Needed?

How long your loved one will need sedation depends on how quickly he or she gets better. This may range from a few hours to many days.

Members of your loved one's health care team will answer any questions or concerns you may have.

## What Can You Do to Help?

Having family members and friends visit is often calming. Offering a loving touch or talking about family activities or fond memories may help reassure your family member.

Your suggestions about what your loved one will find comforting is helpful to the nurses.

Rest and sleep are also important — for you as well. To give your loved one some quiet time, the nurses will schedule rest periods.

If you or others come to visit during that time, the nurses may limit the number of visitors or the time spent visiting.