

Post-intensive Care Syndrome: What You Need To Know

General Information

You spent time in the Intensive Care Unit with a serious illness. This puts you at risk for changes in how you move, feel and think.

These health problems stay after your serious illness. You may hear members of your health care team call this post-intensive care syndrome. It is also known as PICS.

Changes You May Have

Some of the changes you may have include:

- muscle weakness that can affect:
 - use of your arm or leg
 - walking or using stairs
- cognitive changes (problems with memory, thinking, attention or learning) such as:
 - trouble making sense of your hospital stay
 - concentrating
 - following directions
 - interacting with other people
 - making decisions
 - problem-solving
 - remembering.
- mental changes (signs of depression or anxiety) such as:
 - feeling sad, anxious or “empty”
 - feeling hopeless, negative or both
 - feeling irritable or restless
 - losing interest in activities or hobbies you once enjoyed
 - feeling tired, unmotivated or having less energy than normal
 - changes in appetite and weight
 - changes in sleeping patterns
 - thoughts of suicide or suicide attempts
 - strong feeling of fear
 - constant worry.

What Members of Your Care Circle Can Do To Prevent PICS

- Respond to your loved one with patience and understanding. (They may have mood swings or use harsh language.)
- Talk about familiar things, people and events.
- Talk about the day, date and time.
- Bring in pictures or small items from home.
- Read aloud.
- Keep a diary or journal. This can help you understand what happens during your hospital stay, reduce stress and help with your memories.

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- Help with bedside exercises. Talk with the nurse for more information.

What To Do After Your Hospital Stay

- Tell your primary care provider if your symptoms are new or becoming worse.
- Keep all appointments with members of your health care team, even if you are feeling better.
- Follow all directions for:
 - taking medicines
 - going to physical, occupational, speech or other therapy
 - eating.
- Consider joining a support group or talking with a mental health provider.
- Keep a journal.
- Stay busy with activities other than physical or occupational therapy. Ideas include:
 - regular exercise
 - visiting with friends
 - doing puzzles and games
 - volunteering.
- Let members of your care circle help you.

When To Get Emergency Care

Go to the nearest hospital Emergency Department or call 911 right away if you have any signs or symptoms of a life-threatening condition, such as:

- feel like harming yourself or someone else
- chest pain
- breathing problems
- sudden, severe pain
- severe bleeding or throwing up (vomiting) that will not stop
- sudden weakness or vision loss
- trouble talking
- loss of consciousness.

Resources

- myicucare.org
- connect.mayoclinic.org/page/pics