

MAINTAINING PHYSICAL FUNCTION

Need to Knows provide older adults and their families with important information to enhance their hospital or nursing home stays. Communication and teamwork are important aspects of high-quality healthcare. The individual, family, and caregivers are vital members of the team.

Physical function refers to the ability to perform activities such as eating, bathing, dressing, walking, climbing stairs, and taking medications. Declines in functional abilities put older adults at risk for a multitude of issues such as depression, skin problems, and pain.

Why is it important?

Maintaining function is crucial to wellbeing. Functional decline is common during hospital and nursing home stays. Returning to the previous functional level may take time. For everyday spent in bed, it can take 2.5 days to regain the strength to walk. Efforts to maintain function are important.

Talk with the healthcare team about:

What activities are safe for you.

Realistic goals, including living situation, health plans, and assistance as needed.

How to remain as functional and active as possible, for example by:

Sitting in a chair for meals

Sitting at the sink to bathe and/or shower

Walking in your environment

Simple exercises you can do in the bed or chair.

Wear supportive, non-slip footwear.

Tubes and other medical devices can limit movement. Ask when tubes will be removed or secured so you can move about.

Keep your mind active with music, books, and puzzles.

Maintain good food and fluid intake. Talk with the dietitian for food options if you have a special diet.

Get a good night's sleep. Avoid sleeping pills. Earplugs may be helpful in noisy surroundings.

Make sure glasses, hearing aids, and other important items are within reach.

