



FAMILY AND CAREGIVER GUIDE



Maintaining cognitive, physical and emotional well-being in hospitalized older adults



Dear Patients, Families and Caregivers,

This booklet was made to help you care for your loved one after they leave the hospital.

The ideas in this booklet may help lower the risk of delirium, a sudden change in thinking, attention, or awareness that can happen during or after an illness or hospital stay.

Inside, you will find simple ways to help with:

- Hearing and Vision
- Staying Oriented
- Keeping the Mind Active
- Moving and Walking
- Gentle Range of Motion Exercises
- Eating, Drinking, and Spending Time Together
- Better Sleep

These ideas are based on Griffin Health's Hospital Elder Life Program (HELP). They are designed to help family members and caregivers provide safe, supportive care at home. At the end of this booklet, you'll also find additional Griffin Health resources that may be helpful to you and your family.

HEARING & VISION



Good hearing and vision help people stay safe and aware of what is happening around them. These simple steps may help lower the risk of confusion and make communication easier.

HELP THE PERSON HEAR BETTER

- Find a quiet place to talk.
- Turn off the TV, radio, or other noisy devices.
- Make sure hearing aids are clean, working, and being worn.
- Check the hearing aid batteries and replace them when needed.
- Sit at eye level, about 1 to 2 feet away.
- Get the person's attention before you begin talking.
- If one ear hears better than the other, speak toward the better ear.
- Speak slowly using a calm, low voice.
- Use short, simple sentences.
- Use facial expressions, hand gestures, or gentle touch to help explain what you are saying.

HELP THE PERSON SEE BETTER

- Make sure glasses or contact lenses are clean and fit properly.
- Keep the room well lit.
- Use large-print reading materials whenever possible.
- If the person cannot read, read information out loud. Audiobooks may also be helpful.
- Keep important personal items, such as tissues, glasses, and phone, in the same easy-to-find place.

ORIENTATION

Staying oriented means knowing who you are, where you are, what day it is, and what is happening around you.

Even people who are not confused at home may become confused in the hospital or after returning home. Illness, new medicines, and being in an unfamiliar place can make this happen. People with Alzheimer's disease or other types of dementia are more prone to confusion even when home.

These simple steps can help.

HELP THE PERSON STAY ORIENTED

- Talk about things that help the person stay connected to the present.
- When you talk with them:
 - Tell them your name.
 - Remind them where they are.
 - Talk about the day, date, month, and year.
 - Mention the time of day or the season.
 - Talk about what is planned for the day.

It also helps to write this information where it can be easily seen.

You can use:

- A calendar
- A dry-erase board
- A notebook

Update it every day with:

- The day and date
- The weather
- Important plans or appointments

CREATE A FAMILIAR ENVIRONMENT

- Keep the room set up the same way each day.
- Open the curtains during the day to let in natural light.
- Display family photos where they can easily be seen.
- Make sure a clock with the correct time is in a place where it can be easily seen.



COGNITIVE STIMULATION & SOCIALIZATION



Keeping the mind active and spending time with others can help support recovery. Simple activities can improve mood, encourage conversation, and help keep the brain active. They may also help lower the risk of confusion.

The goal is to enjoy time together while encouraging conversation and keeping the brain active.

CHOOSE ACTIVITIES THE PERSON ENJOYS AND CAN DO SAFELY.

Talk About Current Events. Talking about what is happening in the world can help keep the person connected and aware of the present.

You can:

- Read newspaper headlines together.
- Talk about important news stories.
- Encourage the person to share their thoughts.
- Listen carefully to what they say.
- Ask open-ended questions that encourage conversation instead of questions that can be answered with only “yes” or “no.”

Examples:

- “What do you think about that?”
- “What was your favorite part of the story?”
- “How do you think things have changed?”

SHARE HAPPY MEMORIES

Talking about past experiences can help people feel comfortable and connected.

You can:

- Look through old family photos.
- Read old magazines or books together.
- Talk about favorite holidays, vacations, jobs, or hobbies.

Compare how things were in the past to how they are today. These conversations can help connect past memories with the present.

KEEP THE MIND ACTIVE

Choose activities that match the person’s interests and abilities.

Some ideas include:

- Playing cards
- Word searches
- Listening to favorite music
- Board games
- Crossword puzzles
- Singing along with favorite songs

MOVING & WALKING



Moving every day helps keep the body strong. It can improve strength, balance, flexibility, and overall health. If the healthcare team says it is safe, encourage the person to get out of bed, sit up, stand, or walk each day.

Walking and changing positions regularly may also help lower the risk of complications that can happen after a hospital stay.

If the person cannot walk, helping them move safely from the bed to a chair several times each day can still provide important benefits.

BEFORE GETTING UP

Before helping the person stand or walk:

- Make sure the doctor or nurse says it is safe.
- If the bed can be adjusted, lower it to the safest height.
- Raise the head of the bed before helping the person sit up.
- Lower the side rails if needed.
- Help the person sit on the edge of the bed for a few moments before standing.
- Make sure they are wearing non-slip slippers or supportive shoes.

HELPING THE PERSON STAND

If the person has been trained to use a cane or walker:

- Place the cane or walker within easy reach.
- Ask the person to push up from the bed or chair before reaching for the cane or walker.
- Let them stand for a minute or two to gain their balance.
- Encourage them to stand up straight with their head up and back straight.

HELPING THE PERSON WALK

If it is safe to do so:

- Walk at the person's normal pace. Do not rush.
- Walk only as far as the person feels comfortable.
- Turn around before they become too tired.
- Stop right away if they become dizzy, weak, short of breath, or feel unsteady.

RETURNING TO BED OR A CHAIR

When sitting back down:

- Have the person back up until they feel the chair or bed against the backs of their legs.
- Ask them to reach back for the chair or bed with one hand at a time.
- Encourage them to bend at the hips and knees and slowly lower themselves into a sitting position.

ACTIVE RANGE OF MOTION EXERCISES



If a person cannot walk, gentle range of motion exercises can help keep their muscles and joints moving. These exercises may help prevent stiffness, improve flexibility, and reduce the loss of muscle strength.

If possible, do these exercises up to three times each day.

These exercises should not be painful or tiring.

WHILE EXERCISING:

- Encourage the person to breathe normally.
- Ask them to count each movement out loud so they do not hold their breath.
- Stop the exercise if they have pain, feel very tired, or become short of breath.
- Before you begin, help the person sit up in a chair or lie comfortably on a bed.

ARM LIFT

- Place one arm at the person's side with their palm down.
- Keep elbow straight and slowly lift arm as far overhead as is comfortable.
- Slowly lower arm back to side.
- Complete five times.
- Repeat with other arm.

ELBOW BEND

- With arms at the person's side, bend one elbow so that their hand touches their shoulder and then fully straighten the elbow.
- Complete five times.
- Repeat with other elbow.

HEEL SLIDES

- Have the person lie on their back as flat as is comfortable with toes pointing to the ceiling.
- Bend one knee and hip, sliding foot up the bed and as close to buttocks as is comfortable.
- Straighten knee, moving foot back down the bed.
- Lift the heel off the bed to minimize friction if needed.
- Complete five times.
- Repeat with other leg.

ANKLE BENDS

- Bend the person's ankle as far as is comfortable to point toes up.
- Straighten ankle and bend as far as is comfortable to point toes down.
- Complete five times.
- Repeat with other ankle.

EATING, DRINKING AND COMPANIONSHIP



Eating healthy foods, drinking enough fluids, and spending time with others can help people heal after a hospital stay. Good nutrition helps the body heal, fight infection, and stay strong. Drinking enough fluids is also important because dehydration can increase the risk of confusion.

Some people may not feel hungry or thirsty when they are sick. Others may need help eating or drinking because of weakness, vision changes, or confusion. Family members and caregivers can help make mealtimes safe, comfortable, and enjoyable.

BEFORE THE MEAL

- Help the person get ready for a safe and comfortable meal.
- Make sure they are wearing their glasses if they use them.
- If they have trouble seeing, describe where the food is on the plate using the clock method. For example, "Your chicken is at 6 o'clock and your vegetables are at 2 o'clock."
- Encourage the person to wear their dentures if they use them.
- If dentures are not available or chewing is difficult, offer softer foods.
- Help the person sit as upright as possible in a chair or bed before eating. Sitting upright helps make swallowing safer.

DURING THE MEAL

Some people can eat on their own, while others may need help.

You can help by:

- Sitting with the person during the meal.
- Speaking in a calm and friendly way.
- Cutting food into small pieces if needed.
- Buttering bread or opening containers if needed.
- Keeping utensils, napkins, and drinks within easy reach.
- Encouraging the person to eat on their own as much as possible, helping only when needed.
- Gently reminding them to continue eating if they become distracted.
- Encourage fluids. If they are not eating or drinking enough, check with their provider about supplements like Ensure or Magic Cups.

HELP PREVENT CHOKING

While the person is eating:

- Encourage small bites and chew food well.
- Make sure each bite is swallowed before taking another bite.
- If they are experiencing issues with swallowing, consult provider regarding change in food consistency such as puree, chopped, or soft ground).
- Avoid asking questions that require long answers while food is in the person's mouth.
- Avoid making the person laugh while they are eating.
- Drinking enough fluids is an important part of healing.
- Offer small sips of water or other approved drinks throughout the day.
- The person does not need to drink a full glass at one time.
- Small sips taken often can help prevent dehydration.

SLEEP ENHANCEMENT



A good night's sleep helps the body and mind heal.

Too much noise, changes in routine, or an unfamiliar place can make it hard to sleep. Poor sleep may increase the risk of confusion in older adults.

Whenever possible, it is best to help a person sleep without sleep medicine. Some sleep medicines can increase the risk of confusion, falls, daytime sleepiness, and trouble urinating.

Simple ways to help a person relax before bed may improve sleep.

WHAT YOU MAY NEED

- Lotion
- Soft, relaxing music

HELP THE PERSON GET READY FOR BED

Before bedtime:

- Turn off the TV and reduce noise.
- Speak in a calm, quiet voice.
- Help with brushing teeth or cleaning dentures.
- Help the person use the bathroom.
- Make sure the bed linens are clean, dry, and smooth.
- Remove hearing aids and place them safely on the bedside table.
- Give bedtime medicines if they have been prescribed by the healthcare provider.
- Help the person get into a comfortable position.
- Dim or turn off the lights.
- Play soft, relaxing music if they enjoy it.

HELP THE PERSON RELAX

Some people sleep better after relaxing activities such as:

- A gentle back massage with lotion
- A gentle hand massage
- A gentle foot massage
- Only do these activities if the person finds them comfortable.
- Utilize a white noise machine
- Aromatherapy patches or diffusers with provider approval

SLEEP TIPS

- Keep the bedroom quiet.
- Keep the room comfortable and relaxing.
- Follow the same bedtime routine each night when possible.
- A regular bedtime routine can help the body prepare for sleep.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



Griffin Health offers these resources to assist with caring for your loved one.

Here to Home Informational Videos

Available to view online at www.griffinhealth.org/in-patient-care or in the Griffin Hospital Community Health Resource Center. Call the Center at 203-732-7399 for information about viewing the videos at Griffin Hospital.

Plan for Future Healthcare Choices

Griffin Health offers assistance with Advance Care Planning. For more information, email acp@griffinhealth.org or call 203-732-1255.

Griffin Hospital Volunteer Services

For more information about HELP or if you are interested in volunteering at Griffin Health, call 203-732-7555 or visit www.griffinhealth.org/volunteer.