

Avoiding losing your physical and mental abilities

Avoiding deconditioning



You're in the hospital for a while. This health sheet offers some tips on how to avoid a decline in your abilities during this stay.

Why am I at risk of losing my abilities?

You've had a health problem or an operation. You have to stay in the hospital for several days. You may tend to move less than usual. You may see fewer people than in normal times. When you do less activity, your physical and mental abilities can decline. This is called deconditioning.

Those most at risk of losing their abilities are:

- People 75 years of age and older
- People with a fragile state of health
- People who are losing their autonomy

Losing one ability can lead to the loss of other abilities.

For example, if you move less than you used to, you may be less active and lose your appetite. Eating and moving less than before can cause you to lose strength.

Being weak will make it even harder for you to take part in your own care and see your loved ones. And so on.

That's why you need to stay active.

Keeping or gaining abilities allows you to gain even more. For example, moving allows you to see people. Then this motivates you to move even more. And so on. See the image on page 2.



How can I know if I'm losing my abilities?

The care team will assess your abilities while you're in the hospital. They will do this several times during your stay. In this way, they'll check to see if you have the same abilities as before you entered the hospital.

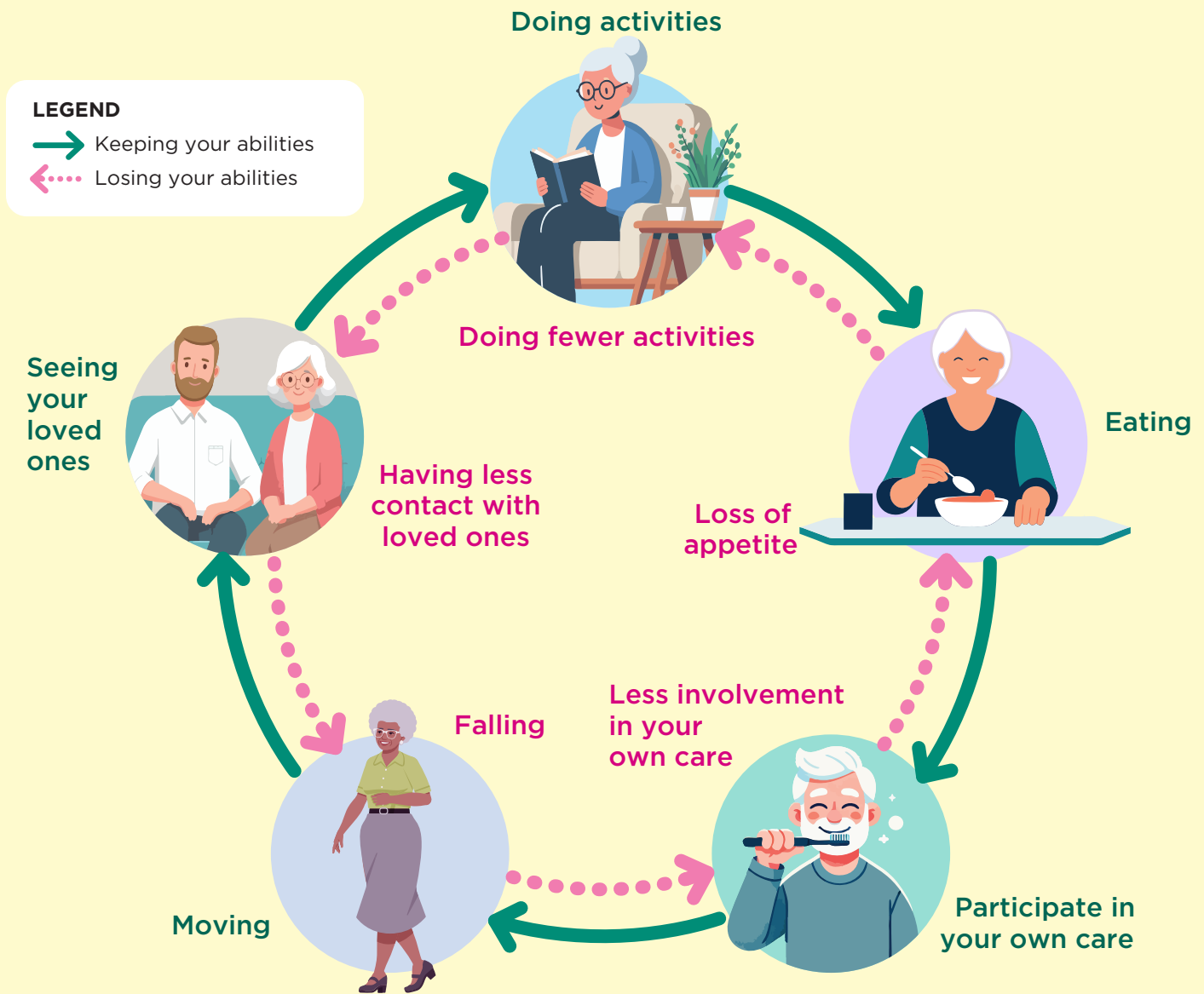
You can also watch for the following signs:

- You find it more and more difficult to move.

- You have trouble thinking.
- You forget things.
- You're less interested in the things you used to like.

If you have any of these signs, tell your care team. They'll help you to avoid losing other abilities. You may even be able to gain some.

KEEPING OR LOSING YOUR ABILITIES



What are the consequences?

Losing too much ability can cause problems.

You may find it more difficult than usual to do some of the following:

- Eating
- Moving
- Sleeping
- Washing yourself
- Breathing
- Making sustained efforts

Losing too much ability also increases the risk of having some of the following problems:

- Falling and injuring yourself.
- Having pressure sores. Read the health sheet [*Preventing pressure ulcers*](#).
- Not having enough water in the body. This is called being dehydrated.
- Being constipated.
- Having trouble holding in your urine.
- Losing touch with reality or being confused, which could be delirium. Read the health sheet [*Delirium - Information for families and caregivers*](#).
- Feeling nervous and depressed.
- Catching diseases caused by microbes (infections).

All of these consequences can slow down your healing, which could then cause you to stay longer in the hospital

Can I regain my abilities?

Usually, it's possible. But if you lose a lot of abilities, it will be harder for you to regain them.

Here's how long it takes, in general, to recover lost strength:

1 day in bed = 3 days of recovery

1 week in bed = 3 weeks of recovery

How can I maintain my abilities?

Do activities you enjoy

For example:

- Reading
- Walking
- Doing word search or crossword puzzles



ATTENTION!

Ask your care team if your health allows you to do these activities. You may not be able to do some of them because of your illness or your operation.

Participate in your own care

This is an exercise in itself. Washing, dressing, shaving, or brushing your hair yourself helps you to keep up your abilities. To motivate yourself, ask your loved ones to bring you your personal items, such as your electric shaver or your hairbrush.

Ask for help

It's important to ask for help when you're having trouble doing something. Your care team is there to help you.

Eat and drink enough

Ideally, eat at least half or more of the meal and snacks you're served at the hospital. Eat sitting in the chair. In this way, you'll maintain a healthy weight and gain strength.

Unless your healthcare team tells you otherwise, drink water and other beverages you enjoy. This way, you'll always have enough water in your body.

Plan time for exercise and rest

Schedule exercise times throughout the day. It's a good idea to move after each meal, as much as you can. See the health sheet [*Staying active in the hospital - To recover, keep moving!*](#)



Respect your limits. When you feel weak or tired, take time to rest. For example, you can take a short nap or relax while sitting in the chair.

But try to do some activities between your resting periods.

If you have trouble sleeping, talk to your care team. They can help you.

Invite your loved ones

Your family and friends can stimulate you, make you move, and motivate you to eat. Don't hesitate to have visitors at the hospital.

Who can I contact if I have questions?

Your care team is there to answer any questions.



RESSOURCES UTILES

Government of Québec

www.quebec.ca/en

In the section "Family and support for individuals", click on "Seniors" → "Preventing deconditioning in seniors"

The GO TO MOVE! program.

A physical activity program tailored to the needs of seniors.

www.move50plus.ca/the-go-to-move/

Other CHUM health fact sheets are available. Ask your care team which fact sheets can help you.



You can also read them online. chumontreal.qc.ca/fiches-sante

The content of this document in no way replaces the advice of your healthcare professional.

To find out more about the Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal
[**chumontreal.qc.ca**](http://chumontreal.qc.ca)