Achieving Early Mobility in Mechanically Ventilated Patients
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Achieving Early Mobility in Mechanically Ventilated Patients

By Linda Bell, RN, MSN • Birck Cox, Illustrator

Long-term survival of mechanically ventilated patients has contributed to the unintended consequence of increased weakness and decreased muscle strength. Previous authors have determined that, after 1 week of bed rest, muscle strength decreases by as much as 20%, with an additional 20% decrease in strength each successive week. Muscle weakness contributes to difficulty in weaning from mechanical ventilation and increased length of hospital stay.

Here's what you can do:

Increasing mobility in intensive care unit patients, particularly those on mechanical ventilation, requires a team effort.

Consider the following:

• Become a champion for increasing mobility in your ICU patients.
• Do a literature search on the effects of prolonged immobilization, especially as it relates to your patient population.
• Provide a collaborative inservice with physical therapists to demonstrate activities that can help maintain muscle strength even for patients on bed rest.
• Discuss early mobility protocols with your nurse manager and medical director.
• Convene an interdisciplinary team to develop policy and assessment tools for starting and stopping mobilization of your patients.
• Develop a team approach to mobilizing the patients even while they are on mechanical ventilation. Include physical therapists, respiratory therapists, and patient care technicians on the team.
• Validate your program by collecting data on patient outcomes.

Other helpful resources:


REFERENCE