



Post-Intensive Care Syndrome (PICS)

The Intensive Care Unit (ICU) of a hospital is where very sick patients are treated, and are sometimes put on a ventilator, or breathing machine, to survive. The illness or injury, and even the treatments you received in the hospital while in the ICU, can often cause health problems that exist long after you have returned home. Recognize the signs and seek help as soon as you can so you can make a more complete recovery. Ask your medical provider if you need guidance finding specialized professionals who can help.

Possible warning signs

- Muscle weakness
- Problems with balance
- Problems with thinking and memory
- Severe anxiety or depression
- Nightmares or hallucinations
- Inability or difficulty completing daily living or work tasks

Types of PICS problems

- **ICU-Acquired Weakness (ICUAW):** muscle weakness that commonly happens while very sick in the hospital. It can take up to a year to recover, and can make daily activities like walking, bathing, dressing, feeding and more extremely challenging.
- **Cognitive or brain dysfunctions:** difficulty remembering, paying attention, problem solving and judgment. This can make returning to work or doing complex tasks quite hard, and while this problem can improve over time, some people may never recover or may need additional support to do so.
- **Other mental health problems:** anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), nightmares, difficulty sleeping, problems controlling emotions or thoughts. This is hard both on the person who was sick as well as their family and requires additional support to be managed effectively.

Types of professionals who can help

- **Physical Therapist:** helps with rebuilding strength, endurance, balance, coordination and ability to be more mobile and independent.
- **Occupational Therapist:** helps with relearning daily life skills, like dressing, bathing, and organizing the steps of a task, like preparing a meal.
- **Speech Therapist:** helps with swallowing or feeding difficulties and problems related to memory, attention and other communication issues.
- **Psychologist:** helps with diagnosing and treating mental health problems, emotional and behavioral issues and working on coping skills.
- **Psychiatrist:** helps with diagnosing and treating mental health problems and can prescribe medication as part of treatment.