

**Ask the Expert**  
*Arizona Republic*

**Q: My grandmother was recently admitted into the Intensive Care Unit (ICU). My brother and I want to visit her, but don't want to be in the way. What should we expect in visiting her? I know the medical staff is trained to give her the best care, but is there anything we, as her family can do to help?**

**A:** I'm sorry to hear of your grandmother's situation. But she is lucky to have a caring and thoughtful granddaughter. You are right to be concerned about when and how you and your brother – and other family members – can visit, and what kind of help you can provide during those visits. Patients in Intensive Care Units very often have compromised immune systems, require assistance from a variety of machines and must undergo frequent testing and assessments. There *can*, therefore, sometimes be too many visitors.

That said, medical professionals never discount the vital part loved ones play in the healing process of their patients. We understand that the true “visitors” in the patient's life are the family members, rather than the healthcare professionals themselves. For this reason, we encourage families to visit as much as the patient desires and is able to tolerate, without causing discomfort.

The Intensive Care Unit is specially equipped to treat patients whose condition requires continuous cardiac monitoring, increased nursing care hours and/or a more intensive nurse-to-patient ratio. Because of the constant monitoring, there will be a team of healthcare professionals, from registered nurses and dietitians to specialists and intensivists, who will care for your grandmother. It is important for families to know that our number one goal is getting your loved one back to health as quickly as possible.

When you visit, here are a few things you and your family can do to help your grandmother:

- Appoint a family spokesperson or two, someone who will be in regular contact with your grandmother's nurses and who can, in turn, inform the rest of the family of her condition, any changes in her treatment plan, etc.
- Stay ahead of her pain. Often a family member can read a patient's unspoken cues better than her nurses. Help your grandmother stay ahead of her pain by encouraging her to ask for pain medications before she is in pain.
- Make sure she stays in bed if she is restricted to bed. The vast majority of patient injuries in hospitals are due to patients trying to get out of bed for restroom visits or other reasons. If she needs to get out of bed, help her call her nurse.
- If she will be in the hospital for a lengthy stay, bring some comforts of home, such as her favorite pillow or blanket, framed pictures, music and books she enjoys.



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- Check with her nurse to see if family members can help your grandmother with hygiene such as combing her hair, putting on lotion, etc. This can help provide a comforting touch, as well as helping her feel better.
- Try to keep visits to two people at a time and for fairly short visits. Your grandmother needs her rest, and if she feels she needs to “entertain” her guests, she won’t get that rest.
- Be sure to keep young children and anyone who is ill away from the ICU, and every visitor must wash their hands before entering the room.
- Lastly, your family members need to remember to take care of themselves as well. It can be exhausting to have a loved one in the hospital, let alone in the ICU. But you will be best equipped to help your grandmother if you are well rested and healthy.
- When in doubt, check with your grandmother’s nurses. They know her situation best, and they also know the benefits and setbacks visitors can present.



*Cathy Frontczak, R.N., is the Director of the Intensive Care Unit at Mercy Gilbert Medical Center. Currently, the ICU has 12 patient rooms and an additional 12 rooms will open in Tower B on January 21, 2008. For more information on Mercy Gilbert Medical Center, please visit [www.mercygilbert.org](http://www.mercygilbert.org) or call 480.728.8000.*