



When a patient is restrained

Information for families

At Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, keeping our patients safe and in the best possible health is our top priority. We strive to provide a safe environment that respects the dignity and privacy of each patient in our care.

When sick patients become confused or agitated

Sometimes, illness or injury causes patients to become disoriented, confused, or agitated. When this happens, we must be concerned about safety.

Sometimes, for example, people who are confused will try to get out of bed even though they are too ill to walk alone. Falls and injuries can occur. Other patients may try to remove critical medical equipment, such as IV lines or breathing tubes. In other cases, especially in the emergency room, patients whose illness has come on suddenly may react in an irrational way to those trying to help them. Injuries to the patient or the staff, or delays in care, can occur.

The first steps

The first step any of our staff members will take in these situations is to identify the patient as “high risk” for being unsafe. Once this determination has been made, members of our staff begin work to ensure that the patient is not injured and that he or she receives the proper care.

Often this means checking the patient more frequently or activating a “bed alarm,” which will alert staff when the patient tries to get up. Other times, the patient will be moved to an area where he or she can be observed more easily. In all cases, nurses and doctors will talk with the patient about what is happening, and will try to enlist the patient’s help in putting safety measures in place.

Choosing restraints

Sometimes, these first steps are not enough. Despite our efforts, the patient is still at risk. In these cases, the patient may need to be restrained.

While this approach may be upsetting, please remember that we are using the restraints to keep the patient safe. Even after a decision to restrain a patient has been made, we continue to look for less restrictive ways to ensure health and safety. Your thoughts about what might be helpful are always welcome.

Care for the patient who is restrained

Some families may worry that their loved one won't receive as much care or attention once restraints are in use. Please be assured that this is not the case. We have stringent policies around the frequency with which a person in restraints must be checked by a nurse. During these checks, the nurse makes sure the patient is not being injured by the restraint, makes observations to determine if restraints are still necessary, and continues to provide routine care. These frequent checks of patients in restraints are documented in the patient's chart.

Any time restraints are used, an order for the restraints must be placed into the patient's record, and the order must be renewed at set intervals. As soon as the patient's physical condition or mental state has cleared to the point where safety is no longer an issue, the restraints will be removed.

You can help

You can help us keep your family member or friend safe. Please:

- Do not adjust the side rails on the patient's bed or stretcher without letting the nurse know. The decision to raise side rails is a clinical decision that is made by the staff and is based on the patient's condition and risk to fall. If the nurse agrees that the side rails may be lowered during your visit, please be sure that they are in their original position when you leave.
- In some areas of the hospital, such as the emergency department or some intensive care or recovery areas, it is usually best to leave curtains around the bed open so that staff can view the patient easily.
- Tell us right away about any concerns that you have about the patient's safety.
- If you think a restraint should be removed, discuss your concern with the patient's nurse or doctor. Please do not remove any restraints yourself; this could put the patient at risk.

We hope this information has been helpful. If you have questions or concerns about restraints or any other aspect of your loved one's care, please talk to a nurse.