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Effect of noise on patients

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Excessive noise is becoming a significant problem for intensive care units (ICUs). This paper first reviews the impact of noise on patients' sleep in ICUs. Five previous studies have demonstrated such impacts, whereas six other studies have shown other factors to be more important. Staff conversation and alarms are generally regarded as the most disturbing noises for patients' sleep in ICUs. Most research in this area has focused purely on noise level, but work has been very limited on the relationships between sleep quality and other acoustic parameters, including spectrum and reverberation time. Sound-absorbing treatment is a relatively effective noise reduction strategy, whereas sound masking appears to be the most effective technique for improving sleep. For future research, there should be close collaboration between medical researchers and acousticians.

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