

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Patient Information

Following your Discharge from ICU or HDU

Adult Patients' information leaflet following discharge from the Critical Care Unit (Intensive Care Unit (ICU) or High Dependency Unit (HDU))

After you have been unwell following your stay in critical care which may have been a long time, it can take a while to feel yourself again. Symptoms of COVID-19 (Coronavirus) are different for each person. This information details some common problems that people may experience when they leave ICU or are discharged from hospital. However, everyone is different and you may find you do not experience any of these problems at all. If you do we have tried to offer some ways of dealing with them which we hope will be helpful to you and your family.

Emotional Health

Why do I feel low in mood?

After being critically ill, it can take time for you to fully recover.

Many people suffer from mood changes, such as irritability, tearfulness and lethargy. This is a normal reaction to being unwell. These feelings might come and go. It is important to accept that it will take time to recover physically and psychologically.

You may find setting small, realistic goals help you to see your progress and feel better in yourself. You may also find that keeping a diary helps this process.

Why am I finding it hard to remember?

You won't remember everything that happened to you in the ICU. Writing down what you can remember may help you to collect together your memories. You could try to remember something about each day you were in hospital to help make sense of the time you lost. As you recover, your memory should improve.

These things can help:

- Using a calendar, phone reminder, note etc. to help you remember things
- Understand it is harder to remember things when you are tired or cannot give your full attention.

ICU Delirium

It is very common to experience delirium when people are unwell in the critical care unit. This is caused by a change in the way the brain is working. The sedative medicines (which were to help keep you safe), along with fever, sleep deprivation and infection, also affect people's memory. This can make you feel confused as it is difficult to know what is real and what isn't. This is even harder for some as for many patients family and friends were not always allowed to be

with you in the hospital. This can make you feel very agitated, or in some cases it can make you feel very withdrawn.

In some cases, people continue to have nightmares or flashbacks of their experiences after they go home. If you are having any of these difficult feelings or memories, it usually helps to talk about it to family or friends. You may also be able to talk about it with your GP or to other healthcare staff if you are given an ICU follow-up appointment at the hospital.

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Emotional Health

Why do I feel anxious?

It is normal to feel anxious after what you have been through. Many patients struggle with the time that they have 'lost' while they were in ICU. Others wonder why they have been unfortunate enough to become so ill. Many patients have nightmares and 'flashbacks' to unpleasant experiences. Some patients also report hallucinations. This is due to a combination of things: sleep disturbance, drugs – especially the strong drugs we use to keep you asleep and comfortable, and critical

illness itself – the brain is unable to cope and does not work very well.

Remember being physically unwell has a psychological and emotional impact as well as a physical impact. It can also have an affect on your memory and thinking. Being severely unwell means you will probably go through a process of adjusting and recovery which may take time. Here are some exercises which you might find helpful:

1. Breathing

When we are anxious or upset our breathing becomes more rapid. We can feel better by deliberately slowing and relaxing our breathing. Anxious breathing is up in the chest, whereas relaxed breathing happens deeper in the belly.

Relaxed breathing technique:

- Breathe in slowly and steadily through your nose for a count of 4 – don't rush this
- Pause for a count of 1
- Exhale slowly and steadily for a count of 4 – breathe out gradually.
- Repeat for a few minutes until you notice a change in how your body feels
- If you get distracted, or if your mind wanders, just bring your attention back to how it feels to breathe in and out.

2. Grounding statement

We can sometimes forget that we are safe in the present. It can be helpful to write a 'grounding statement' to remind yourself that you are safe. You can read it if you become upset.

For example "I survived and I am safe now."

3. Mindfulness

Mindfulness is about being aware of what is happening in the present, moment-by-moment, without making judgements about what we notice. Our minds can be focused on things in the past, present or future. Mindfulness is a practice which encourages us to reflect on the present moment. There is good evidence that mindfulness practice can help people cope more effectively with a wide variety of feelings, including physical feelings such as pain.



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Why can't I sleep at night?

Whilst recovering from COVID-19 you may need regular sleep to keep your body healthy. It can take time to get back into a normal sleep routine. You may find it harder to fall

asleep, or you may often wake during the night. If you have difficulty sleeping for over four weeks, contact your GP for more support.

Sleep is important, but if you are struggling here are a few helpful tips to follow....

- Avoid caffeinated drinks e.g. tea, coffee and cola; there are decaffeinated options available
- Avoid high sugar foods before bedtime
- Avoid bright screens such as phones, TVs, computers and tablets. You can minimise the impact by turning down the brightness of your devices
- Try and keep to a regular routine, this means going to bed at the same time every night if possible
- Wear an eye mask to block out the light
- Try to utilise aromatherapy, lavender essential oil is well known for its relaxing qualities
- Listen to soothing music or audiobooks to help you relax
- Make sure you are cool and comfortable
- Utilise relaxation techniques such as meditation/deep breathing exercises.



Remember to look after your mental health

It's normal to feel worried about COVID-19. This is an uncertain time and you might be feeling bored, lonely, anxious, frustrated or low. It's important to remember that for most people these feelings will pass. Here are some things that you can do to look after your mental health:

- Stay connected with friends and family: for example, by phone or via the internet
- Talk about your worries to your family and friends, or look at the contacts at the end of this leaflet
- Carry on doing things you enjoy
- Keep on getting support for your physical and mental health difficulties, if possible. Many healthcare providers offer phone or video appointments.
- Eat healthy meals and drink enough water
- Exercise regularly
- Try not to drink too much alcohol
- Try to maintain a regular sleeping pattern.

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Physical Health

Why do I feel that I have no energy?

Fatigue or **tiredness** is the most common reported symptom following a Covid 19 infection. When you've been critically ill you will probably feel very tired and won't have much energy. Setting daily small goals can help you.

Some patients have described a 'fatigue wall' after performing exercise. Try not to be discouraged or give up if this happens. Try to recognise your body's limits after a serious illness and restart the next day.

Try breaking your activities into smaller tasks that are more manageable for example: Brush teeth, rest, wash face, rest, comb hair, rest. Slow your activities down. It can be very

frustrating to be unable to things as quickly and easily as before, but remember that this will not last forever. Try not to push yourself too hard as this can end up making your recovery take longer.

Learn the 3 P's:

- **PACE:** break up activities throughout the day, sit to complete some activities, rest.
- **PLAN:** spread activities throughout the day/week.
- **PRIORITISE:** some tasks are necessary/ some are not. Ensure you use your energy on tasks that are necessary.

Why are my joints and muscles sore and stiff?

Some patients suffer from painful, stiff joints following a stay in ICU. This will be more likely to happen if you have spent a long time on ICU. This is because your joints and muscles will be weak and unused to moving after such a long time in bed. During your stay on ICU it may have been necessary to turn you onto your front in a technique called 'proning'. This was to try to improve the amount of oxygen your lungs were receiving. Although we try very hard to put your limbs in comfortable positions, this may add to stiffness and soreness. Some patients require painkillers short term to help with joint and muscle pain, however, the best cure is to keep moving. Your physiotherapy team will help you to practice movements to relieve pain and stiffness.

Why does my voice sound different?

If you had a tube in your throat which helped you to breathe, it would have passed through your vocal cords. This can impact on the quality and sound of your voice. This usually recovers on its own over time, but if it is causing you any difficulties you should speak to your GP who can refer you to a Speech and Language Therapist (SLT).

Hearing loss

There is early evidence that a significant number of patients report some hearing loss following Covid-19. Further research is being undertaken at present.

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Physical Health

Why do I feel breathless?

Feeling breathless is another reported common symptom following COVID-19.

You may feel breathless after even the smallest amount of effort such as moving around in the bed or getting out of bed,

walking, getting dressed, climbing stairs, or doing jobs around the house. Being breathless can make you panic or feel frightened. When you get breathless, try not to panic. Your breathing pattern will settle.

What positions can I use when I am short of breath?

Choose a position from the suggestions below which suits what you are doing and where you are. When you are in any of these positions it is important to relax. If you feel that your breathing is getting worse, or you start to experience a new type of difficulty in breathing/breathlessness it is important that you get medical advice.



Sitting leaning forward

Sit leaning forward with your elbows resting on your knees. Make your wrists and hands go limp.



Sitting upright

Sit upright against the back of a firm chair. Rest your arms on the chair arms or on your thighs. Make your wrists and hands go limp.

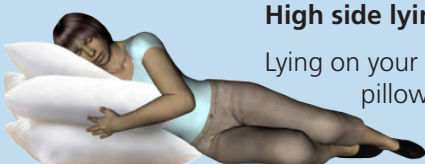


Standing leaning forward

Lean forwards resting your elbows onto a wall, a windowsill, a railing or a countertop. You could lean on a walking stick or a long umbrella if you use one. You can lean on a trolley while you are out shopping. A walking frame with wheels can be helpful.

Standing leaning back or sideways

Lean back or sideways against a wall, with your feet slightly apart and about one foot (30cms) away from the wall. Let your hands hang loosely by your sides, or rest them in your pockets. You may prefer to rest your hands or thumbs on your belt loops or waistband, or across the shoulder strap of your handbag.



High side lying

Lying on your side, with a few pillows under your head and shoulders.

Sitting leaning forward at a table

Sit leaning forward with your elbows resting on a table. You can also put a few pillows or cushions on the table to rest your head on.



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Swallowing difficulty/problems

If you have been on a ventilator (breathing machine) for several weeks, and in some cases required a tracheostomy (a hole in the front of your neck where a breathing tube can be attached) this may affect your ability to swallow. Sometimes things may 'go down the wrong way' and make you cough or splutter when you eat or drink. You may be seen by a SLT either in the critical care or on the ward. Some patients have to be nil by mouth for a while until their swallowing becomes stronger and may need a nasogastric tube that passes down their nose, straight into their stomach to be given liquid food.

Please be aware that some people may experience altered taste for up to 12 months post illness.

If you are continuing to experience problems with swallowing after hospital discharge or are coughing when you eat and drink, speak to your GP who can refer you back to a Speech and Language Therapist.

Why am I losing my hair?

You may notice changes to your hair and some of it may fall out. This is not unusual and can even happen months after you leave hospital. It usually grows back but it may be more curly, straight or thin, or a different colour from how it was before.

It is very important to stay hydrated, eat a healthy and balanced diet, get adequate rest and manage stress. Some patients find taking vitamin supplements can be beneficial following hair loss. Talk to your GP or ask about this in a follow up appointment with the ICU team.

There is no clear timeframe of recovery following a Covid-19 infection. Some people return to work fairly quickly, while others need many months of slow rehabilitation. Be kind to yourself and do not set your expectations too high.

What if I'm continuing experience problems?

Please contact your GP if you have any particular worries or concerns to identify what support is available. If you have a follow up hospital appointment do let the healthcare professional know if you have worries or concerns.

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Other Support Services

Intensive Care – resources for patients and relatives
icusteps.org/information/guide-to-intensive-care

Critical Care Recovery
www.criticalcarerecovery.com

Covid-19 post critical care NHS resources
www.yourcovidrecovery.nhs.uk/what-is-covid-19/

Asthma UK and British Lung Foundation support/advice
www.post-covid.org.uk/get-support/

Royal College of Occupational Therapists
How to conserve your energy: Practical advice for people during and after having COVID-19 (May 2020)
www.rcot.co.uk/conserving-energy

Local Group Resources Website
covidmutualaid.org/resources/

MFT Chaplaincy Services
0161 276 8792

Other Helpful Resources

NHS Physical Activity Guidelines and Tips
A series of downloadable leaflets of exercises to help flexibility, strength and balance
www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/physical-activity-guidelines-older-adults/

AgeUK Healthy Living
This guide has practical tips for looking after yourself physically and mentally
bit.ly/3athttU

Depression Alliance
www.depressionalliance.org

British Voice Association
www.britishvoiceassociation.org

Swallowing Problems after COVID-19, SALT, MFT 'Dysphagia'
www.youtube.be&v=5yzkgnfiRzU

Voice Problems after COVID 19, SALT, MFT
www.youtube.be/Y9QqYuHhSkI

Mindfulness Tips and Resources
www.bangor.ac.uk/mindfulness/audio/index.php.en

Local Wellbeing services offer various counselling, therapy, courses and support. Contact them on the following, or discuss with GP: All these services continue to accept referrals but sessions will be via phone or video call.

Self Help Services – Manchester, Stockport and East Cheshire. Also covers Rochdale, Heywood and Middleton, Tameside and Glossop, and Therapy in Salford and Trafford
0161 226 3871 or 0161 480 2020
www.selfhelpservices.org.uk/shs_type/psychological-therapy/

Trafford Psychological Therapies
0161 357 1350
www.gmmh.nhs.uk/tpt