

Patient information factsheet

Going home after your stay at the major trauma centre

We have given you this factsheet because you are going home from the major trauma centre. It aims to provide you with some useful information about returning to your normal daily activities and advice to help your continued recovery at home, along with details of where to access further support. We hope it will answer some of the questions you may have.

It is important to remember that everyone's injuries and recovery are different, and that it's not unusual to feel worried or unsure when the time comes to leave hospital. There may be a number of adjustments required for you and those you live with. Try to remember that going home is a very positive step in your recovery, and that there is support available for you and your family should you need it. It is a good idea to share this factsheet with your loved ones. If you have any further questions, please speak to a member of our team.

Before you leave hospital

Before you leave hospital, please refer to the 'Your stay at the major trauma centre' factsheet.

Travelling home

You may feel anxious about travelling home, especially if you have been involved in a road accident. It can be helpful to give some thought to things that might be comforting or reassuring for you during the journey, such as driving more slowly than usual or travelling with people you trust. Talking to our staff or your family or friends about this before you leave hospital may help.

On your journey home, we recommend:

- wearing loose, comfortable clothes
- taking frequent breaks (if it is a long journey)

If it is not possible for a family member or friend to take you home, speak to the nurse in charge who will arrange hospital transport for you.

Arriving home

It is normal to feel tired (physically and emotionally) when you arrive home. After a major trauma, it can take time for your body to get back to a normal routine. This includes your:

- sleep pattern
- appetite
- pain control
- bowel movements

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- mobility
- confidence

You may find that your first few days at home are challenging, and activities you used to be able to do easily may be harder. These may include:

- washing
- dressing
- cooking
- walking around your house

We encourage you to continue any activities and exercises you were given in hospital.

Recovering at home

Wound care

If you have a wound, you will need to keep your wound clean and dry while the dressing is on. The dressing does not need to be changed every day, as this increases the risk of infection.

If you require a follow-up for wound care, this will be arranged by the medical team or nursing staff. This care will be provided in the community. You may also have your wound checked and dressing changed at a hospital clinic appointment.

Once your dressing has been removed, you can wash your wound gently with unperfumed soap and water. You should pat your wound dry.

You should see a practice nurse or GP if:

- your wound becomes painful
- your wound becomes more red
- there is more discharge than usual coming from your wound
- you feel generally unwell
- you feel feverish or have a temperature of above 38°C

These could be signs of infection.

Pain and medications

You may still be in pain when you go home from hospital. This is normal.

We will give you a two-week supply of medication when you leave hospital. It is important to make sure you take regular painkillers. Regular painkillers, movement and gentle exercise can help you to return to your normal daily activities faster. You should contact your GP for repeat prescriptions or more painkillers if required.

Being less active after having a major trauma is common. However, this can result in avoiding activities to reduce pain, which in turn creates more pain. Do not wait until the pain is overwhelming before taking medications. Over time, you can wean off this pain relief as your injury heals.

If we have given you laxatives to take home, you should continue to take these while you are on strong painkillers. This will prevent constipation. If you have loose stools, you can miss a couple of doses of laxatives. However, you should not stop them completely until your bowel movements are back to normal.

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You should contact your GP or call **111** if you have been unable to pass stools for a few days

Some medications can cause side effects. Make sure you read the information that comes with your medications. You can discuss any concerns about your medication with your GP.

Please note that it is illegal to drive in England or Wales when taking some prescription medications, such as morphine.

Diet and nutrition

Your bones and soft tissues need to heal after a severe injury or surgery. To help with this, you should aim to have a balanced diet and include a variety of food. A balanced diet includes the following:

- protein (such as meat, fish, lentils, pulses and tofu)
- calcium (such as milk, cheese and yogurts)
- vitamin C (such as fruit juice, fruit and vegetables)
- carbohydrates (pasta, rice and potatoes)
- vitamin D (we advise taking a vitamin D supplement containing ten micrograms of vitamin D daily, especially during autumn and winter and if you are not able to go outside. Check with your doctor or pharmacist.)

Constipation

Constipation is common after a major trauma, and can be caused by:

- reduced mobility
- having less appetite than usual
- taking certain medications

Eating more fibre and drinking plenty of fluids will help. Aim for six to eight glasses of fluid a day. Good sources of fibre are fruit and vegetables, wholegrain cereals and wholemeal bread. If you have been eating less fibre than usual during your stay in hospital, it is important to increase it gradually.

Weight management

You may have a smaller appetite than usual or have problems eating and drinking. You may lose or gain weight when you return home. If possible, weigh yourself at home once a week. If your weight is changing without you trying, you should ask your GP to refer you to a dietitian for advice.

Having a bath or shower

You can have a bath or a shower when you get home unless you have been told otherwise. If you have a plaster or dressing, you must protect it to stop it getting wet. You can get waterproof covers for your plaster from different suppliers. Please speak to a member of staff if you need more details.

Smoking

Smoking after a serious injury delays bone and wound healing. It also increases the risk of a chest infection. We recommend that you stop smoking or reduce the number of cigarettes that you smoke.

There is free NHS support to help you stop smoking. You may also be referred to a smoking cessation advisor who can support you.

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If you have used nicotine replacement products (such as patches) during your stay in hospital, continuing with these may be the best option during your continued recovery. Further information about stopping smoking can be found in the 'Useful links' section.

Alcohol

You should check the leaflets in your medication to see if it is safe for you to drink alcohol. If it is safe to do so, we advise that you do not drink more than 14 units (seven pints of lower-strength beer, lager or cider) per week, or more than three units (one large glass of wine) per day. You should spread your alcohol intake over the week.

Increasing your alcohol intake can cause:

- changes in your emotional state
- poor sleep
- a reduced appetite
- delayed healing of your injury
- poor balance (an increased risk of falls)
- depression
- anxiety

We would recommend that you do not drink alcohol if you have had a traumatic brain injury.

For more information about alcohol and drug intake, please speak to your GP or contact the alcohol care team. Their details can be found at the end of the factsheet.

Medical support at home

Your GP will be able to advise you on general medical questions. They can also refer to you a range of services.

Plaster cast

You will need to have your plaster checked if:

- your plaster feels tight
- you have swelling in your fingers or toes
- your fingers or toes are a different colour (such as pale or blue)

You should contact the plaster room. Their contact details can be found at the end of this factsheet.

Follow-up appointments

You may need a follow-up appointment. If you have any questions when you get home, please contact the major trauma practitioners. Their contact details can be found at the end of this factsheet.

Hospital transport is not usually arranged for outpatient appointments such as follow-ups. If you need hospital transport, please contact the department where your follow-up appointment is booked. They will provide you their contact details when they book the appointment.

Exercises

Your physiotherapist or occupational therapist may have given you some exercises to do when you go home. It is important to complete these to help your recovery. You should set aside time in your day to do them. You can take painkillers 30 minutes before you start your exercises, if needed.

Returning to normal activities

Driving

You will need to let the DVLA know about your injury. You can do this by completing form B1 online. Based on the information you give them, the DVLA will decide when you can drive again. More information about driving after a head injury can be found in the 'Useful links' section of this factsheet.

The following are viewed as driving impairments:

- driving with your leg in a plaster cast
- driving with your arm in a plaster cast
- driving while wearing a neck brace
- driving while wearing a back brace

If you have had a traumatic brain injury or neurological event, you should not drive. Your insurance company will have its own conditions for when you are insured to start driving again, so it is important you check your policy and liaise with them for any queries.

Work

Hopefully you will be able to return to your previous employment after your injury. However, this will depend on the type of injury and your role at work.

You may be tired when you go back to work. You should talk to your employer about any additional equipment you may need or ways you can adapt your:

- workload
- working hours
- working environment

You should talk to your employer, GP or physiotherapist about a staged return to work, if this is needed.

You may notice problems with your thinking skills (attention or memory) when you return to work. You may find that the following help:

- using a quiet space
- having more rest breaks
- using memory aids (such as a pen and paper or a wall chart)

You can ask your work occupational health department for help, and you can talk to your physiotherapist in any follow-up appointments you have.

Sick notes

If you are off work for more than seven days, your employer will usually ask you to provide proof that you've been ill. They will normally ask for a fit note from your GP.

The fit note must be signed by a doctor. Hospital staff can provide you with a fit note to cover your initial treatment. However, you will need to speak to your GP about any further fit notes. Your GP may ask you to book an appointment with them so they can review you.

Physical activity

It is normal to worry about increasing your activity levels.

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We recommend that you gradually increase your activity levels. You should aim to pace yourself and space activities throughout your day and across the week. This will avoid a 'boom and bust' cycle, where you do a lot of activity on one day and then need to recover the next day.

You may need to increase your painkillers to help you to gradually increase your activity levels. However, this should only be for a short period of time. You can speak to your GP, physiotherapist or the doctor who sees you in clinic if you are finding it hard to make progress because of pain.

Sleep

You should try to follow good sleep hygiene habits. These include:

- going to bed and getting up at the same time each day
- ensuring you relax before going to bed, for example by:
 - having a warm bath
 - avoiding using electronic devices one hour before sleep
 - reading a book or listening to the radio
- making sure your bedroom is:
 - dark
 - quiet
 - tidy
 - kept at a temperature between 18°C and 24°C

Children and childcare

Children may feel unsettled and upset about what has happened.

You should give children the chance to ask questions about what has happened, your injuries and your treatments. It may be useful to have a family calendar showing your hospital appointments, so children can understand when and why you are going back to hospital.

It is important to be honest with children about what has happened and to use language that they understand. However, you should try to reassure them and remind them that you are safe. You should check in with them regularly to see if they have any questions. You may also want to let your children's teachers know what has happened.

If you are worried about your child's emotional health, you can speak to your GP.

Emotional wellbeing

It is normal to experience strong emotions after an injury. You may be unable to relax, or you may feel:

- easily annoyed (irritable)
- tearful or anxious
- overwhelmed when you think about the future
- scared of activities you used to be able to do (socialising or leaving the house)

You may also have:

- flashbacks, nightmares or unwanted memories of the event that led to your injuries
- difficulty engaging with healthcare professionals or your rehabilitation programme
- physical symptoms (such as pain, being unable to sleep and reduced mobility)

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You may find it helpful to speak to a friend or family member about how you are feeling.

If you feel that your emotional wellbeing is not improving, you should speak to your GP about whether you need extra support, such as speaking to a counsellor. There are also confidential helplines you can call. Their details can be found at the end of this factsheet.

Intimacy

It is normal for there to be a change in physical intimacy or for people to experience a reduced sex drive after a serious injury. This may happen for a few reasons, such as discomfort from the injury or because of the emotional after-effects of trauma. You may find it helpful to talk to your partner about this to see if you can solve any difficulties together. You can also talk to your GP who can refer you for further support, if required.

Feedback

If you would like to leave feedback about your care or treatment at the major trauma centre, please speak to a member of your healthcare team. For more information about leaving feedback, please visit: **www.uhs.nhs.uk/contact/tell-us-about-your-experience**

Contact us

If you have any concerns about the major trauma centre or this factsheet, please contact the ward you stayed on at Southampton General Hospital. You will be able to contact them via switchboard on **023 8077 7222**.

Alcohol care team

Telephone: **023 8120 5721**

Plaster room

Telephone: **023 8077 4852** (Monday to Thursday, 8.30am to 4.30pm, Friday, 8.30am to 1.30pm).

If you have a problem with your plaster cast outside of these hours, please go to your nearest emergency department.

Useful information

Legal advice

A free, comprehensive legal service is available to patients and their families. This service can offer free advice on a wide range of issues, including welfare benefits, housing, financial issues, insurance issues, employment, powers of attorney and care.

If you would like more information about this, please contact the major trauma practitioners.

Useful links

Driving

After a head injury

www.gov.uk/head-injury-and-driving

www.headway.org.uk/about-brain-injury/individuals/practical-issues/driving-after-brain-injury/

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Blue badge

You may be able to get a Blue Badge to help you while you are recovering. To apply for a Blue Badge, contact your local council or visit: www.gov.uk/apply-blue-badge

Emotional wellbeing support

italk (Hampshire only)

You can self-refer to this service.

Website: www.italk.org.uk/self-referral/

Telephone: **023 8038 3920**

Email: info@italk.org.uk

Steps2Wellbeing (Southampton and Dorset)

You can self-refer to this service.

Website: www.steps2wellbeing.co.uk/self_referral

Samaritans

If you are in an emotional wellbeing crisis, ring **116 123** or email: jo@samaritans.org

Diet and nutrition

www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/

www.bda.uk.com/resource/malnutrition.html

www.bda.uk.com/resource/weight-loss.html

www.bda.uk.com/food-health/food-facts.html

Smoking

www.nhs.uk/better-health/quit-smoking/

www.quit4lifeblog.wordpress.com

www.smokefree.gov/

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