

## Patient information factsheet

# Recovering after intensive care

This factsheet is a guide to your recovery after a stay on one of the intensive care units (ICU). We hope it helps to answer some of the questions you may have throughout your recovery both on the general ward and also later at home.

### While you were on the ICU

As you were getting better on the ICU, the team would have reduced the sedation you were on which kept you asleep. You may have memories from this time when the breathing tube would have still been in your mouth and preventing you from talking. You would have participated in regular rehabilitation sessions while on the ICU but possibly have little or no memory of them.

### Leaving intensive care

We know that leaving intensive care can feel daunting, so we will try to give you as much information as possible in this factsheet about what to expect throughout your recovery. We also understand that this may be a worrying time, so please see the end of the factsheet for where you can get further support.

Once you are on a general ward, a member of the outreach team (critical care nurses) may visit you depending on how quickly you are recovering. These nurses review patients' progress and make sure that the move to the new ward goes smoothly.

Where possible, the therapy team will work alongside the ward staff to continue your ongoing rehabilitation plan, increasing your strength and getting you mobile again. It is likely that your muscles will be profoundly weak and your joints will be stiff. You may find it hard to undertake even simple tasks or movements.

The therapy team will also encourage you to take an active role in looking after yourself, such as getting washed and dressed in your own clothes. This will increase your independence as you progress towards going home.

We may give you an exercise program to help improve your strength and stamina. The therapy team will continue to work with you, as needed, until you are fit enough to be discharged to your own home, a rehabilitation unit or to your local hospital.

### Common physical symptoms after a stay on the ICU:

- shortness of breath
- fatigue
- muscle and/or nerve weakness
- weight loss
- poor appetite or weak swallow
- hair loss

# Patient information factsheet

- taste changes
- skin changes
- persistent cough (particularly if you had COVID-19)
- stiff joints

## Common psychological problems after a stay on the ICU:

- vivid dreams or delusions from ICU
- guilt
- struggle with 'losing' time while sedated
- poor sleep
- unable to do complex thought processes
- delusions
- poor concentration or memory
- feeling low
- weird dreams

## Caring for your mind

As you recover from your illness, it is common to experience many of the problems listed above. This is normal at this stage and will improve over the months ahead.

Many people experience vivid dreams and hallucinations while they are in intensive care. These may be frightening or bizarre and you may find it difficult to differentiate dreams from reality. These usually stop before you leave the ICU but in some cases they may continue for a while on the general ward. Please be aware that the memory of these dreams may remain 'vivid' for many years to come.

Visiting is not permitted during the COVID-19 pandemic and so the ICU team aimed to keep your relatives informed by telephone and in some occasions through a virtual device such as an iPad.

You may find it helpful to download some of the apps recommended below onto a smart device to use at home. They are free to download.

- Headspace (mindfulness)
- MyPlate (track daily calories, exercise and more)
- Peak (brain training)
- Rise Up + Recover (diet, mood, nearby help, resources, exercise, emotions and custom reminders to inspire you)
- WellMind (NHS mental health and wellbeing app to help with stress, anxiety or depression)
- One You Couch to 5K (exercise progression)

## Leaving hospital

When you are close to leaving hospital, your therapist will aim to meet with you to discuss ways in which you can continue to work on your rehabilitation once you leave hospital. Everyone takes a different amount of time to fully return to their normal level of function. Be prepared that full recovery may take six to 12 months.

## Eating well to get better

It is important to get as much energy, protein and nutrients from your diet as possible, as this can help speed up your recovery.

# Patient information factsheet

After your illness, you may experience a variety of side effects, such as changes to your sense of taste, pain in your mouth or throat, and feeling full quickly, which may affect the amount you can eat.

To make sure you are eating enough:

- you should aim to have two to three snacks between meals
- you should choose high-energy and high-protein options
- you may need to have 'build-up' drinks that contain extra vitamins and minerals
- you may need to choose softer foods
- you may need to experiment with flavours

The amount of fluid you drink is also very important. We advise drinking six to eight glasses of fluid a day. Hot drinks, water and squash all count. To help you stay on track, we recommend setting yourself a target to aim for by the end of the day.

You may have been seen by one of the dietitians in the therapies team. If you have not and you are struggling with any aspects of eating or drinking, please speak to one of the staff on your ward. If you have left hospital, you can ask your GP for advice or request a referral to a dietician. For further information, you can also visit the ICUsteps website or email the ICU follow-up team.

## Work and financial support

Recovering from illness can be stressful at the best of times. It is a different experience and a different time frame for everyone, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. You may experience some changes to your physical, mental and emotional abilities, which may affect your ability to look after yourself and your children, and return to work or your hobbies.

We know this process can be very difficult for families too, which can add additional stress to your recovery. You will be given a medical fit note to give to your employer to let them know how long you need to be off work. This note can then be reviewed by your GP if you need extra time.

There are also a number of schemes that may be able to support you financially. You can find out more information about these from your GP, Citizens Advice Bureau or on NHS websites, such as the NHS Low Income Scheme. If you need any legal advice or assistance, please ask a member of the hospital ward team.

## Medicines advice

If you have any questions about your medicines after your hospital visit please contact the medicines helpline on: **023 8120 6907**, or email: [medicinesadvice@uhs.nhs.uk](mailto:medicinesadvice@uhs.nhs.uk)

## Who should I contact?

The recovery process is different for everyone and there are many different factors involved. If you have any questions about your recovery process or your condition while you are in hospital, please ask a member of the hospital ward team.

Once you are home, please contact your GP or you can contact the ICU follow-up team with questions about your recovery.

# Patient information factsheet

If the condition of your health deteriorates significantly, please call **111**, your GP or **999** if it's an emergency.

## ICU follow-up

During the COVID-19 pandemic limited support will be available. However, you are welcome to contact us if you are really struggling mentally, emotionally or psychologically at home.

Email: [uhs.icufollowup@nhs.net](mailto:uhs.icufollowup@nhs.net)

Telephone: **023 8120 6116** (if this goes to answer machine, leave your name, DOB and a contact number).

## Peer support

Facebook groups: **UHS ICU peer support**

Online peer support is available from those who have also been unwell on ICU or had close relatives affected by an intensive care stay.

Peer support virtual meetings (informal online gatherings of past patients and relatives) are running during the COVID-19 pandemic. These meetings allow people to share stories, give and receive support from each other and access healthcare staff if they have any ongoing concerns. Please email [uhs.icufollowup@nhs.net](mailto:uhs.icufollowup@nhs.net) if you would like to join one of these meetings.

## Useful links

There are a number of websites that can give further advice and information, such as:

[www.criticalcarerecovery.com](http://www.criticalcarerecovery.com)

[www.icusteps.org](http://www.icusteps.org)

[www.yourcovidrecovery.nhs.uk](http://www.yourcovidrecovery.nhs.uk)

Both of these websites are run by the critical care community (previous patients, relatives and staff members) and can be very reassuring, as many other people and their relatives will be experiencing the same issues as you when you go home.

# Patient information factsheet

## Individualised recovery plan

Goal	Action plan	Completed by: (MDT)

Additional information as required (chair exercises, bed exercises, exercise regime)

**Physical:**

**Non-physical :**

For a translation of this document, or a version in another format such as easy read, large print, Braille or audio, please telephone **023 8120 4688**.

For help preparing for your visit, arranging an interpreter or accessing the hospital, please visit **[www.uhs.nhs.uk/additionalneeds](http://www.uhs.nhs.uk/additionalneeds)**