

yourself. Remember to work on things you enjoy as well as the “to do” list. Your strength should slowly return as you re-build activity.

ICU Steps: Cardiff Critical Care is now establishing an ICU-Steps follow up support group run by former patients and nursing staff. Meeting others who have been patients or had relatives in critical care can be helpful. For more details of the next group, please contact the unit directly.

If you had a stay longer than 7 days, it's possible the nurses would have kept a **“Critical Care Journal”** for you. Cardiff Critical Care runs regular Journal Clinics, where we will go through your journal with you. Reading it can help you understand what happened. It may take a while before you feel ready to read it, and it can be very emotional, but many patients who have read their journal find it helps them understand what happened.

You may have questions about your stay in critical care, so you can contact the team to request an appointment. This usually involves being invited back to Cardiff Critical Care to look around, see some of the staff who looked after you and find out more about what happened to you and go through your notes.

The idea of going back to the unit can be frightening and it may be some time until you feel ready to do it. However, it can be very helpful to see where you were and find out more about what happened to you. You won't remember everything that happened to you.

When should I seek professional help?

Most psychological symptoms will go away by themselves after a few weeks.

However, if you are still experiencing the following after one month from discharge from hospital, go to speak to your GP:

- Anxiety or worries every day, that interfere with what you feel able to do
- Low mood or depression every day, which may impact on motivation, your opinion of yourself, and your thoughts about the future
- Continued poor sleep, including ongoing nightmares or flashbacks
- Acting very differently to before
- Not being able to work or look after the home and family
- Having deteriorating relationship difficulties
- Using drugs or drinking too much

Go to see your GP who may be able to offer you treatment or refer you to counselling to help you through this difficult time.

In a few cases, patients (and their relatives) can have extreme symptoms of stress after their treatment in the Critical Care. This is known as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and is rare. Most people who have suffered from PTSD found that talking to a professional helped.

Further support

www.cardiffcriticalcare.co.uk

www.icusteps.org – ICU Steps is a registered charity, setup in 2005, run by former intensive care patients and relatives. They aim to improve the care and support available to patients recovering from critical illness.

Information adapted from ICU Steps
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Patient and carer information

Psychological recovery post critical care stay



GIG
CYMRU
NHS
WALES

Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol
Caerdydd a'r Fro
Cardiff and Vale
University Health Board

Psychological Experiences During Critical Care Stay

Critical Care can be a frightening place for patients and their visitors. In the first few days of your critical care stay the medical treatment you require may affect your body and mind.

- You may not be able to remember much of what happened.
- You may experience altered perception of what is happening around you, including hallucinations, nightmares or dreams that can seem real and very frightening.
- The effects of illness and medication can lead to confusion, and some patients feel paranoid that you are trapped and people are trying to hurt you as they try to make sense of what is happening (this may be caused by having drip lines and catheters inserted into your body to help support your body's normal functions and monitor your condition).
- Feeling slightly aware, but not knowing where you are or what is happening.
- You may experience fears and worries.
- If you stay longer than a few days you might start to feel down, lonely, or frustrated.
- The fear these experiences cause can remain for weeks after you have been transferred to a general ward or discharged from hospital.

These experiences can impact on how you feel when you leave critical care and go onto a ward and then home. People feel differently about their time in intensive care. Some have no clear memory of it, or they may try to forget it.

For others, being so ill can be a very traumatic experience and it may take time for them to come to terms with it afterwards.

Psychological Recovery After Critical Care Stay

After being critically ill, it may take many months for you to fully recover physically and psychologically.

Your physical recovery is likely to impact upon how you are feeling – you may at first feel weak and it may require more effort into doing simple things, such as getting dressed and moving about. This can make some people feel low as they do not feel “back to their old selves”. It can also feel difficult to if you need a lot of help from other people at this early stage.

Many people also think about what brought them into critical care in the first place, and can feel quite emotional when they come to terms with this.

Common experiences post critical care

It is not unusual to feel the following in the first month or two:

- Feeling upset and tearful
- Feeling snappy or irritable
- Feeling guilty for the worry everyone experienced
- Feeling like you have changed as a person, and wondering if you will feel the same again
- Feeling tired
- Not returning to a “normal” sleeping pattern
- Losing interest in what you look like

- Loss of appetite
- Not fully remembering what happened in critical care
- Having strange memories of critical care, that feel like they can't have happened but feel so real
- Feeling scared that you almost died
- Worrying about getting ill again
- Loss of confidence
- Vivid dreams, nightmares, or “flashbacks”

Friends and family's responses

Your family and friends will be pleased to have you home, but they may not understand why you may feel like you do. Talk to them about how you feel, and show them this leaflet to help them to understand the common experiences.

What will help me cope?

Sleep: You 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 trouble sleeping your GP can give you advice if you have trouble sleeping, but things should return to normal as you become stronger and more active.

Managing Stress and Anxiety: As you get better and start doing more, you will face new challenges. They can make you feel scared – try to keep calm and take slow, deep breaths. Seek support from your friends and family.

Pacing: It can take time to recover physically, so try to pace your physical activity and do not rush