

## Is there anything I can do to help my relative?

Taking care of yourself is probably one of the best ways of helping your relative.

Try to make sure that you stay well and don't wear yourself out emotionally. It can be easy to expect yourself to be superhuman at stressful times.

Although your relative may not be conscious, it may be helpful, for both of you, if you continue to talk to them and to touch them. If you feel awkward about doing this, or unsure of the equipment, please ask the nurse to show you.

Some people find it helpful to get involved in the physical care of their relative. If you would like to work with the nurse to care for your relative, by helping to wash your relative, for example, they will be happy to show you the best ways to help.

Most patients have no memory of the time spent within Critical Care, and can sometimes find this frustrating.

For most patients who stay longer than seven days we start a Patient Journal which is helpful to contribute to. This is returned to the patient if they wish following discharge, and it helps to fill in memory gaps.

## Further support

[www.cardiffcriticalcare.co.uk](http://www.cardiffcriticalcare.co.uk)

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

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Patient and carer information

# Friends and relatives of the patient in critical care Taking care of yourself



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## How am I going to cope?

This is probably a very stressful time in your life. People can have a range of reactions. You may feel anxious, tearful, angry, sad, guilty, frightened, shocked, a feeling of numbness or nothingness. People often talk of feeling helpless and frustrated, wishing that there were more they could do.

All these reactions are NORMAL responses to having a relative as a patient within Critical Care.

You may also find some feelings difficult to control – you might find that you cry easily and feel shaky. These can all be frightening reactions, especially if you are not used to these feelings. Remember, these are normal reactions not a sign of your inability to cope or of going mad. Talking to someone about how you feel may give you some relief.

It is not unusual for people to experience physical signs of stress. These might include:

- Increased heart rate,
- Dry mouth,
- Difficulty in concentrating
- Dizziness
- Shaking
- Indigestion
- Muscular tension that may lead to pain such as headaches, neck ache etc.

These are all reminders of the need to take care of yourself at this difficult time.

## It is important you take care of yourself

There is no right or wrong way of coping. Here are some ideas that people have found helpful:

- What has helped you during difficult times in the past? It may be chatting to a friend, time on your own, asking for help, finding out more information. Are there any of these that would help you now? Give yourself breaks. Do not feel that you have to be at the hospital all the time.
- Take some time to relax, or at least to reduce tension. Even if you are unable to sleep, spend some time in the quiet. You may feel better following a soak in the bath.
- To help you sleep, try to have a relaxing bedtime routine. Don't just fall into bed and expect to sleep. Spend some time trying to wind down – have a bath, warm drink (but not coffee!)
- Use the support that is available to you, such as family and friends. You may want to ask someone to come with you to the hospital or to stay with you at this time. Ask them for what you feel you need. Friends often benefit from being told what they can best do to help you.
- Remember to eat – you may not feel hungry but you need to keep your energy levels up.

## Support for you

It can really help not to bottle up how you are feeling. Your friends and family are often great sources of support – although they may need you to tell them how best to help.

If you have any questions, however silly you may think they may sound, please ask the nurse caring for your relative. We know that this is a confusing place and that you may feel better if you know what is happening.

If you wish to speak to the medical staff, ask the nurse at the bedside who can ask the zone leader who will arrange the appointment with the consultant.

The hospital chaplains are available if you would like someone to talk to. You do not need to be religious or go to church to speak to them.

They can be contacted by telephone:

029 2074 3230 or by email:

[spiritual.careteam@wales.nhs.uk](mailto:spiritual.careteam@wales.nhs.uk) or by calling in at the chapel, which is by the central lifts, on the fifth floor.

The chapel is a very peaceful place to take a break, or have some quiet time.

It is open 24hrs, 7 days a week.

**If you need additional support, the nurse at bedside can refer you to our Clinical Psychologist.**