

Supporting you after a stay in Intensive Care

Adult Intensive Care Unit

Information for Patients

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Introduction

Intensive care is needed if someone is seriously ill and needs intensive treatment and close monitoring, or if they have had surgery and intensive care can help them recover.

Patients on an Intensive Care Unit (ICU) are looked after closely by a specially trained team of healthcare professionals. You will be connected to equipment by a number of tubes, wires and cables. This equipment is used to monitor your health and support your bodily functions until you recover.

Someone in an ICU will often have been on painkillers and medicine that makes them drowsy (sedatives). This is because some of the procedures and equipment used to aid treatment can be uncomfortable.

When you no longer need intensive care, you will be transferred to a different ward to continue your recovery, before eventually going home.

Transferring to a different ward can be a difficult time for you and your relatives, as there is no longer the one-to-one nursing care that there was in the ICU, but you are still far from being well. This can be frightening but is normal at this time in your recovery. You will be monitored by the ICU outreach team while you are on the ward to check your progress.

How will my intensive care stay affect me?

Being sick enough to need intensive care has a big impact on your body and mind and can affect all aspects of your life.

Recovery can take up to 18 months so be patient with yourself and follow the advice of your GP and other health care providers.

**Health information and support is available at www.nhs.uk
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

Visit www.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk for maps and information about visiting Leicester's Hospitals
To give feedback about this information sheet, contact InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk

What problems might I have?

Changes affecting your body:

- You may have lost a lot of weight.
- You may be very tired and even simple things can be exhausting. Your muscles will have weakened while you were ill and it will take time to build them up again.
- Your throat may be sore and you may have some changes to your voice, especially if you needed help with your breathing while you were ill.
- Your skin may be dry and itchy.
- Your skin may feel sensitive.
- Your hair may feel different or even fall out. This is due to the stress you were under. It usually grows back.
- Food may taste and smell different for a while.
- You may not be very hungry.
- You may have difficulty controlling your bladder at first. The bladder is a muscle too, and it can become weak if you had a tube draining your urine (urinary catheter) during your care.
- You may have problems sleeping. See next page for tips to improve your sleeping.

Changes affecting your mind and your mood:

- You may have trouble concentrating and remembering things for a while.
- You may find you are not interested in things you used to enjoy.
- You may find yourself easily overwhelmed by situations or large groups of people.
- It is very normal to feel quite down or short tempered. Feeling weak and having to work hard to do even the simplest of tasks can be frustrating, which can upset your mood.
- You may find you worry more than you used to about your health.
- You may feel very frightened or even a bit paranoid at times. Some people are quite shaken when they realise how ill they were. People often feel frightened that it may happen again or that they may die.
- You may have some very strange dreams, nightmares or flashbacks. When you were ill your brain was ill too, and these feelings are part of how your brain tries to make sense of what happened to you.
- Most people remember very little of their stay in the Intensive Care Unit.
- Sometimes people develop post traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD) after an ICU stay. This is very rare, but if you are concerned our follow-up clinic or your GP can help.

Changes affecting your relationships with other people:

- You may feel like your family treat you differently or expect you to recover more quickly than you feel you can. This can be frustrating and upsetting.
- Your family are likely to be finding this time very difficult as well. They remember your ICU stay very well and it is likely they found the experience of seeing you so ill very scary. They will need time to process this.
- It's better to talk to each other honestly about how you all feel. Bottling it up and getting angry usually makes things worse.
- If you are having trouble with your memory and this is upsetting you, ask your family to tell you about your time in ICU. If you have a patient diary, going through this with your family can help start the conversation.

Managing problems with sleeping

Some people have problems returning to their normal sleeping pattern after a stay in intensive care. The actions you take to get good sleep is known as sleep hygiene and maintaining these can help. Some tips to improve your sleeping are given below:

- Try to limit naps to no more than 30 minutes per day. Naps can help you to feel more alert but too much daytime sleep is disruptive.
- Avoid stimulants like caffeine (coffee/ tea/ cola/ energy drinks) and nicotine (tobacco products) close to bedtime.
- Try not to drink too much alcohol. Alcohol can make you feel sleepy but too much means you don't sleep as well.
- Some foods can disrupt sleep or lead to heartburn which can be uncomfortable. Try to avoid heavy, fatty meals just before bed. Spicy meals or even citrus fruit can affect some people.
- Exercise in daylight hours. This will be within the limits of your recovery but even some simple stretches can help. Don't exercise before going to bed though, it may keep you awake.
- Try and get exposure to natural light in the day. This helps your brain recognise when it is time to go to sleep.
- A night time routine such as a warm, caffeine-free drink such as herbal tea or taking a bath helps some people.
- Avoid looking at screens such as mobiles, computers or tablets just before bed.
- Make sure your bedroom is comfortable. Most people sleep better in a cooler room (15 to 19°C). Make sure your mattress and pillow are comfortable. Turn off or at least turn down light sources such as mobiles, TV or lamps. Reduce any noise, but if you find silence uncomfortable have a consistent noise such as a fan or white noise generator.
- Listening to sleep recordings from mindfulness apps available on the internet may help.
- Ear plugs and/ or eye masks can help, if noise or light is disturbing your sleep.

Getting help from the ICU follow-up clinic

Please remember these problems will not affect everyone and most of these will get better with time. Details of how to get more help and advice can be found below.

Our follow-up clinic gives you an opportunity to go through what happened to you with a senior doctor and senior nurse and ask any questions you may have. The aim is to help you understand your experience and help you to move forward in your recovery. Most people find it helpful.

If your stay in ICU was longer than 3 days, it is likely you will be automatically invited to a follow-up clinic. It doesn't matter how long it has been since your ICU stay, you are welcome to make an appointment. You can make an appointment by the contact details below.

Contact details

Adult Intensive Care Units:

Leicester Royal Infirmary: 07971 626 198 or by email: LRIITUFollowUpClinic@uhl-tr.nhs.uk
Leicester General Hospital: 0116 258 4763
Glenfield Hospital: 0116 258 3154

Further information for available support

VitaMinds www.vitahealthgroup.co.uk: VitaMinds works in partnership with the NHS to provide a talking therapy service and counselling in Leicester. If you are experiencing extreme worry, low mood, depression, anxiety or a lack of motivation, they can help. It is a free and confidential service, and you don't need to visit your GP for help. You can self-refer using the website (click 'NHS Self-Refer' at the top of their homepage) or call 0330 094 5595.

ICU Steps www.icusteps.org: charity set up by former ICU patients and their families to promote better support and rehabilitation after critical illness.

UK Sepsis Trust www.sepsistrust.org: charity promoting awareness of sepsis and providing support to those affected by it. Support Team: 0808 800 0029 General enquiries: 0800 389 6255

Samaritans www.samaritans.org: provide confidential, unbiased support 24 hours a day for people who feel distressed, desperate or suicidal. Helpline: 116 123

اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات کسی اور زبان میں درکار ہیں، تو براہ کرم مندرجہ ذیل نمبر پر ٹیلی فون کریں۔
على هذه المعلومات بلغة أخرى، الرجاء الاتصال على رقم الهاتف الذي يظهر في الأسفل
જો તમને અન્ય ભાષામાં આ માહિતી જોઈતી હોય, તો નીચે આપેલ નંબર પર કૃપા કરી ટેલિફોન કરો

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਹੇਠਾਂ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਗਏ ਨੰਬਰ 'ਤੇ ਟੈਲੀਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ।
Aby uzyskać informacje w innym języku, proszę zadzwonić pod podany niżej numer telefonu

If you would like this information in another language or format such as EasyRead or Braille, please telephone 0116 250 2959 or email equality@uhl-tr.nhs.uk