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COVID-19 Recovery

Therapy Information

Pack

Developed by Therapy Services
for

Swansea Bay University Health Board

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This document is also available in Welsh.

Mae'r ddogfen hwn ar gael yn Gymraeg.

Introduction

After a period of being unwell, it is very common for recovery to take some time, especially if you have been admitted to hospital. This is also true of COVID-19 (coronavirus).

Symptoms of the virus and the effects of an admission to hospital vary from person to person.

The advice in this information pack may be helpful to you as you start your recovery from COVID-19 at home.

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Moving and Exercise

You may find that as a result of being ill in hospital you feel achy or tired. This can occur after having a virus and from muscle loss a lot of time resting in a bed or chair. It is therefore important to try and rebuild muscles as soon as possible after an illness and being active will help you to do this.

What can you do to help yourself?

As you begin to recover, regular movement is key. Little and often is best. So regularly, standing up out of your chair and walking around your home is a good place to start.

As you start to feel stronger a short walk outside may help to build up your muscles and lift your mood. You can increase how far you walk gradually as you start to feel stronger.

Reintroducing normal daily activities such as housework, gardening or cooking will help you regain strength and function. The section which follows describes how best to pace your daily activities.

What about exercise?

Choosing an exercise you enjoy is important. Start by doing small amounts each day and build up gradually at a pace you feel comfortable. It may be helpful to keep an exercise diary to monitor your progress as this may encourage you to keep motivated and stay on track.

Your physiotherapist may provide an additional exercise sheet with more specific exercises if required.

The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (CSP) has put together a list of resources, which may help you to become as active as possible and do this safely in your home. These resources are online. If you do not have access to the Internet, we hope you can ask a family member, neighbour or volunteer support group to print some of these resources for you. www.csp.org.uk/keepactive

Fatigue Management

You may find you are experiencing fatigue following your stay in hospital having had COVID-19. This is normal after being unwell with a virus or lung condition.

Feeling nervous, anxious or frightened are also common feelings associated with breathlessness and fatigue.

What can you do to help yourself?

When managing your energy levels, the most important thing to remember is not to do too much and wear yourself out completely. These techniques can help to manage your energy levels.

Prioritise: Make a list of things you'd like to achieve over the day/week. List them in order of importance to you, make sure you include showering, dressing and eating as these all use energy too. For your list, ask yourself:

- What needs to be done?
- What is important for me to do myself?
- Can I ask someone else to help?
- Who can I ask for help?

Plan: Use a week planner with time slots per day and over the week to schedule these activities. Equally important are rest and relaxation. This is important to avoid doing too much or too little

Pace: Rushing to complete tasks so that you can return to resting is **counterproductive**. Slowing down and pacing yourself uses less energy so you will be able to be more active for a longer amount of time. This applies when moving, speaking and eating.

Make your activities less demanding: Making activities easier saves energy whilst maintaining independence such as re-arranging your environment to have items within reach, between shoulder and hip height, and sitting down to complete tasks.

Here are some helpful tips: <http://www.ottoolkit.com/blog/energy-conservation-and-your-ot-patient/>

Breathlessness

Breathlessness is a normal response to being active, but it is also normal to experience some breathlessness doing simpler tasks after having a lung infection, such as Covid-19. **It is important that you don't completely avoid the things that make you breathless, but you should use how breathless you feel to guide how much activity you do.**

This is the BORG breathlessness scale and it describes how much effort your breathing feels.

When you are being active or exercising in the first 6-8 weeks after being discharged from hospital, you should aim to keep your breathlessness score at or below 3.

Tips for Managing Breathlessness

Positioning

Sit leaning forward, with your elbows resting on your knees, or on a table. You could also lean forwards onto a windowsill or worktop if you are standing. Stand leaning backwards onto a wall, whilst letting your arms and hands relax.

Breathing exercises

Breathing control is a gentle breath using the least effort and is used when you are short of breath or feeling fearful, anxious or panicked.

- Get into a comfortable position where you can be relaxed
- Breathe in gently, preferably through your nose, but if not, through your mouth
- Breathe out through either your nose or mouth
- Gradually make your 'out' breath longer than your 'in' breath

Shortness of Breath Modified Borg Dyspnea Scale	
0	Nothing at all
0.5	Extremely Slight (just noticeable)
1	Very Slight
2	Slight
3	Moderate
4	Somewhat Severe
5	Severe
6	
7	Very Severe
8	
9	Extremely Severe (almost maximal)
10	Maximal

Pursed-lip breathing can be used at any time to control your breathing. You can also use it during an activity that makes you breathless to help you feel less short of breath.

- Breathe in gently, preferably through your nose, but if not through your mouth
- As you breathe out, 'purse' your lips as if you were going to gently blow out a candle or whistle
- Blow out for as long as is comfortable without emptying your lungs

What else?

In the future, if your breathlessness persists, your doctor may suggest attending something called Pulmonary Rehabilitation. This is a programme designed to help people that are breathless because of a lung condition, which could be of benefit to you.

There are also lots of resources and information available from the British Lung Foundation. You can access their website using this address <https://www.blf.org.uk/>

Cough

If your cough is productive of secretions, your physiotherapist will provide you with airway clearance techniques. It is important that you complete these as instructed to aid your recovery and prevent further lung infections.

If your cough is non-productive (dry) then suppressing it can help to conserve your energy. Your physiotherapist will provide information and guidance on this if required.

Eating and Drinking Well

Eating and drinking is a complex activity involving lots of different nerves and muscles. Our breathing control is very important too. In order to feel healthy it is important to drink enough fluids and have a diet that contains enough nutrients.

If you have recently had a diagnosis of COVID-19, you may have trouble with eating and drinking due to:

- General fatigue and weakness which can impact greatly on your chewing and swallowing.
- Spending time in ITU and requiring a breathing tube/ventilation to help you breathe can result in swelling and discomfort in your throat
- Weak swallowing muscles – When we eat and drink, we use lots of nerves and muscles which can become weaker over time if they are not being used. If you did not eat and drink for a period of time in hospital, your swallowing muscles may have become weaker.
- Reduced appetite.

If you have been assessed by a Speech and Language Therapist during your hospital admission you may have been given advice about how to make eating and drinking easier, such as having softer foods or thickening your drinks. If needed, you may have been given a program of exercises to help strengthen your swallow.

Please contact your GP should you experience ongoing difficulties with eating and drinking or have any of the following symptoms:

Coughing during or after eating and drinking	New and frequent chest infections
Wet or gurgly voice after eating or drinking	Food sticking in your throat

Symptoms of Covid-19

Symptoms of Covid-19 can vary greatly; you may not experience any or all of the symptoms listed on the next few pages. This information is intended to give some practical tips for maintaining good nutrition while you recover from your illness and support your immune system.

Mealtime fatigue or shortness of breath

If you are finding mealtimes challenging because you feel tired or breathless try these techniques:

- Try having 6-8 smaller snacks throughout the day, rather than three larger meals. This may help give you energy throughout your day and reduce the risk of you feeling excessively tired after your meal. If you don't feel up to eating food then consider a milky drink instead
- Soft and moist meals and snacks can be easier to manage when you are feeling tired. If you are having something dry, consider adding a sauce or chutney to make it easier to manage
- Eat slowly, ideally sitting upright and keeping your breathing even. If you are struggling then stop, rest and try again a short while later
- Ask friends and family members to help with meal preparation
- Keep a flask or drinks bottle nearby containing drinks

Cough

If your cough is persistent...

- Make sure you are drinking regularly, aim for 6-8 glasses per day. You will need more if you have a fever, diarrhoea or vomiting.
- It is an "Old Wives' Tale" that dairy foods should be avoided – THIS IS NOT TRUE, unless you have a known allergy to Cow's Milk Protein.
- If you have a bout of coughing during a mealtime, stop and rest and then try again when you are ready.

Looking after your mouth

This is very important if you are having difficulty eating and drinking and also if you have had any help with your breathing in hospital. The use of breathing masks and tubes can cause your mouth to become very dry which can encourage more bacteria to develop.

Regular mouth care is important to help prevent infections and dryness.



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Dry / Sore Mouth

Some people get a dry mouth when they use oxygen, nebulisers or some inhalers. If this is the case it can affect your appetite. Some things you can do to help yourself are...

- Choose soft and moist foods.
- Take small frequent drinks
- Ice lollies made with fruit juice or squash, sugar-free gum and boiled fruit sweets may help.
- Drinking plenty. Fruit juice may sting so try less acidic options such as squash, milk or milk based drinks
- Cold food and drinks may be soothing but if not try adjusting the temperature of your drinks to see if it helps; room temperature may be most comfortable.
- Salty or spicy food may also sting if your mouth is sore.
- Soft, moist food is less likely to scrape at sore areas.

Tell your doctor if you have a persistent dry or sore mouth as they may be able to prescribe something to help. You may also need painkillers before mealtimes if your mouth is very sore.

Taste Changes

Changes in your sense of taste can occur for many reasons but can impact upon your appetite and desire for food. Some things you can do to help yourself are...

- Sharp, spicy and sweet foods have a stronger taste. Keep trying different seasonings and sauces to find what suits you.
- Taste changes may not last long so if you go off a particular food, try it again regularly.

Reduced interest in food or low mood

If you are finding that you are not feeling hungry or don't feel like eating, you could:

- Eat with other people within your household
- Think about how the food is presented, for example do you have a preferred plate or cup?
- Choose meals based what you feel like eating that day.

Weight Loss

If you have lost weight, it is important to eat and drink enough. Some things to try are:

- Have three meals a day and some snacks between meals
- Have at least two nutritious drinks a day, such as milkshake, smoothies, hot milk drinks
- Drink 6-8 glasses of liquid every day - tea, coffee, water

You can add “toppers” to enrich foods to help you gain weight and have more energy. You could try:

- | | | |
|-----------------|--------------|---------------------|
| • Grated cheese | • Mayonnaise | • Evaporated milk |
| • Cream | • Butter | • Dried milk powder |

Enriched milk : Add four heaped tablespoons of milk powder to every pint of full cream milk and use at least one pint of this milk on cereal, in drinks and puddings each day.

What can I do if I find making meals difficult?

- Consider using ready meals and convenience foods
- Have food or frozen meals delivered to your door by companies such as Wiltshire Farm Foods, Oakhouse Foods, supermarkets or local shops.
- Allow family and friends to help with shopping and cooking when possible.
- Your local council may offer support if you are self-isolating and don't have any family or friends to help with shopping

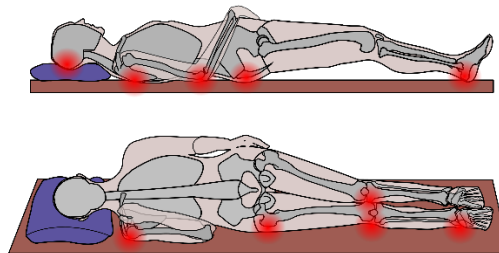
If you continue to lose weight after trying these suggestions, or if you are still not eating and drinking well, please tell your doctor or another healthcare professional.

Pressure Ulcers and Posture

Pressure ulcers (sores) are damage to the skin and underlying body tissue caused by unrelieved pressure on bony body parts. They can occur very quickly and can have devastating consequences.

If you find yourself spending a long time in one position, here are a few ways to help reduce your risk:

- Pressure ulcers can develop from a lack of movement – try and move as often as you can
- Check skin in at-risk areas of the body: buttocks, sacrum (or tailbone), hips, ankles, heels

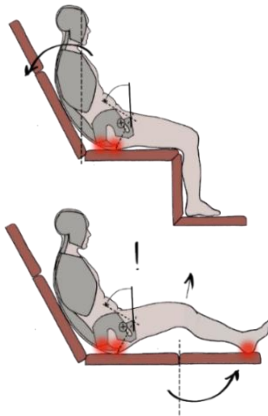
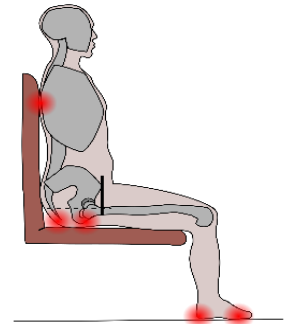


- Sit out in a chair where it is safe and practical to do so – an hour makes a difference
- Consider seat set-up in relation to areas of the body. Your posture can change over time
- Pay attention to sitting or lying postures that can increase pressure risk to vulnerable areas
- If you are in bed and moving less, use supports to help keep your shoulders in line with your hips, support the legs if needed. Try to avoid staying in a rotated (twisted) position
- Use pillows, cushions or folded, soft towels/blankets if official bed positioning equipment is not available
- Don't forget the feet. Offload heels where possible

Seat set up

It is important to consider how your seat can affect your risk of developing pressure ulcers. Consider:

- Seat too wide – Buttocks, elbows at risk
- Seat too narrow – Hips at risk
- Seat too high – Sacrum, buttocks, back of thighs at risk
- Seat too low – Buttocks at risk
- Seat too deep – Sacrum, buttocks at risk



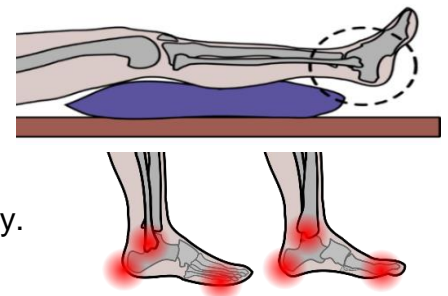
Also, the following are important to consider:

- Using the recline function might increase pressure over sacrum
- Lifting the legs can increase pressure over sacrum
- Tilt can be used to reduce pressure to the pelvis
- Consider impact of additional cushions, this could make the chair too high for someone

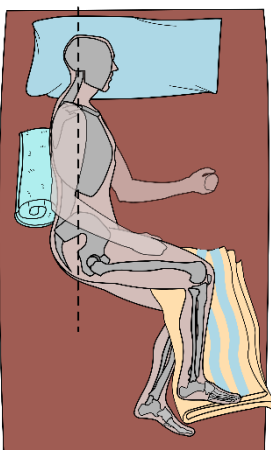
Don't forget the feet

Feet can become vulnerable to pressure ulcers, free float the heels where possible to reduce risk.

Make sure any equipment issued for the feet is fitted correctly.



Contractures - Prolonged bedrest can lead to the development of contractures (muscles tightening).



- Contractures create pressure on areas of the body that aren't normally loaded
- Body parts contacting with each other can cause further risk
- Encourage alignment of shoulder and hip; support the legs if needed
- When sitting is not possible other measures should be taken to promote best possible flexibility
- Bed supports will not only benefit long term function and posture but also prevent against uneven pressure on certain parts of the body.

Images: Helen Frost/PUPIS

Voice problems

Talking can be more difficult if you are breathless. Your voice might sound weak, quiet, rough or hoarse. You may have a sore throat if you have been coughing a lot. You are more likely to have these problems if you needed a breathing tube in hospital.

Breathing is very important to enable us to speak in a clear voice that can be easily heard and understood by others. You may feel that your voice is weak and your speech is not as clear as it used to be. This should improve as your symptoms resolve.

Should your voice problems persist for several weeks, please contact your GP who may arrange for you to be assessed by an Ear Nose and Throat doctor and a Speech and Language Therapist if your problems don't resolve.

Sleep

After a period of illness, you may frequently feel tired, or not able to sleep properly. You may also experience intense, vivid dreams or nightmares that feel very real. It is very important to have regular sleep in order to keep your body and mind healthy. Although it can take some time to get back to a normal sleep routine, the following strategies may be helpful:

- Try get into a regular sleep routine and stick to going to bed at the same time and waking up at the same time each day.
- Avoid caffeine late in the day and instead try a milky drink before bed.
- Unwind with a relaxing bath or shower if possible.
- Listening to the radio or reading a book, and avoiding screens like your phone or TV for an hour before bed may help.
- Using a room spray with a relaxing scent, such as lavender may help to promote sleep.

The following **websites** include some strategies on sleep hygiene you may find useful:

www.sleepio.com

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/sleep-and-tiredness/how-to-get-to-sleep/>

Confusion

After a period of illness, it is common for people to experience confusion. The feeling of confusion may still continue on discharge from hospital. It can range from mild confusion, which may be like feeling a bit 'muddled', or may be more severe, which is known as 'delirium'.

Mild confusion may be a normal side effect of infection, poor appetite or dehydration, lack of sleep, medication side effects, or change in routine. This will usually pass as time goes on. If you experience mild confusion, it is very important to drink plenty, eat well and rest as much as possible.

Severe confusion, or delirium, is commonly experienced after people have been in intensive care in hospital, and if people have required support with their breathing with use of a machine in hospital. Delirium can be caused by a number of factors and it can be a frightening experience for the person facing it, as well as for relatives or carers. Someone experiencing delirium might see or hear things that are not there but which seem real. These are known as hallucinations and can be very distressing. This can also lead to other difficulties, for example paranoia, anxiety and isolation. The experience of delirium can fluctuate and it is common for people to function as normal for periods of the day, and then lapse into a state of confusion.

Although this is usually temporary and is likely to resolve as time goes on, it can take some time for symptoms to fully resolve. **If new, severe confusion is experienced at home, medical attention should be sought.**

The effects of confusion may result in changes to your emotions or your behaviours. You may feel more tearful or agitated than usual. You may notice that you have difficulty remembering things, or you may find that it takes you longer to process information.

Ways to manage delirium and support recovery

The experience of delirium is individual and therefore, everyone may respond in different ways. As noted above, delirium is usually temporary and does not usually leave lasting emotional effects. However, in order to help manage the experience, it may help to:

- Write down what you can remember about being unwell and being in hospital if possible, to help piece together your memories.
- Talk to others about how you are feeling to help you to make sense of the experience.
- If you feel able to, you may wish to have contact with the staff involved in your care. It may not be possible to do this in person at the moment, as you may not feel ready and physical restrictions may make this impossible, but you may wish to arrange telephone contact to help make sense of what happened.
- If you notice changes in your memory, try to make short lists and visual prompts and reminders to support your daily routine.

Some people may not want to talk about their experience of illness and being in hospital, and may not wish to remember what happened. It may be challenging to think about this time and it may be a gradual process of being able to think about what happened – again this is a normal experience. It is important to monitor any difficulties you are experiencing and to engage in follow up appointments with staff involved in your care.

If you continue to experience difficulties that feel overwhelming or do not improve, please consult your GP for additional support.

The following **website** has lots of useful information on strategies to recover following an episode of confusion: Intensive Care Patient Support Charity:

<https://icusteps.org>

Psychological Wellbeing

If you have been hospitalised as a result of COVID-19, it may have an impact on your psychological wellbeing. This can be negative but also has been evidenced to be positive.

You may have had experiences of being separated from your loved ones while you were in hospital, or having been confused or unconscious while you were being treated. These things can also have an impact upon psychological wellbeing.

There are a lot of different ways that you can help manage/improve your mood. We have outlined some ways below, but everyone is different and you may have your own preferences.

Feeling anxious

We know that this is a time of uncertainty and it is natural to feel anxious. Anxiety can manifest in many ways both physically and mentally, this can include palpitations, tense muscles, stomach problems, over-breathing, worrying thoughts, poor sleep and many other symptoms.

There are things you can do to reduce anxiety.

- **Identify what triggers your anxiety.** Ask yourself, “What am I anxious about?” Is there anything in particular that you are worried about, it may be that you can’t pinpoint it and that you generally feel anxious.
- **Challenge your thoughts.** Our mind is very powerful and we often jump to conclusions. Look at the evidence for what you are thinking? Is it the only possible scenario? Are there other alternatives? It may not be as bad as you are worried about.
- **Distract yourself.** Doing things that distract you from your thoughts are good, anything where you lose track of time can be good.
- **Practise Relaxation and Mindfulness.** Relaxation and mindfulness have been shown to reduce anxiety and improve mood management.

<https://www.mind.org.uk/>

Panic attacks

If you feel anxious your breathing rate increases which can cause a panic attack. A panic attack is an overwhelming feeling of danger/stress often caused by a trigger. When stressed, our bodies react to protect ourselves from a perceived danger. This is a 'fight' or 'flight' or 'freeze' response when our bodies release adrenaline. Usually when panic attacks occur, there is no physical danger. Everyone experiences panic attacks differently but a common feeling is that they are having a heart attack—you are not.

Recognising a panic attack

You may experience the following sensations during a panic attack: Heart pounding, chest pains, changes in breathing pattern, feeling breathless, pounding in the head, feeling faint, feeling terror, feeling anxious, feeling hot, sweating, choking feeling, stomach churning.

How to re-gain control after a panic attack

- Practicing controlled breathing— breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth
- Sit down wait for it to pass. Some distraction techniques like counting or noticing sounds or colours can be helpful.

Here's a task to try:

3 Minute Breathing Exercise

1. Sit quietly, close your eyes and turn your attention to your breathing.
2. Become aware of each in-breath and out-breath.
3. Notice how the air feels as it enters your nostrils, fills your lungs and leaves again.
4. Fill your lungs slowly, bottom to top, breathing in as though every cell in your body is breathing.
5. Breathe in until you can breathe in no more, then breathe out softly.
6. If your attention wanders, bring it gently back. Just focus on your breathing....focus on the physical sensation of breathing.
7. Pay attention to your body, any sensations you notice and the sounds of the room.
8. Continue this for 3 minutes
9. When you feel ready slowly open your eyes, stretch and continue with your day.

Low Mood

Most people will suffer from low mood at different times of their life, which can be the result of an event or things not going the way we planned. These feelings normally subside within 2 weeks although this can be longer experiencing a traumatic event or being unwell. Low mood and depression are different. Feelings of low mood may develop into depression if not addressed.

Relaxation

- Using guided relaxation and relaxation breathing techniques boost your immune system, reduce your blood pressure and boost your energy levels.
- Plan in time to complete relaxation and practice breathing techniques as part of fatigue management. Useful resources can be found here:

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/relaxation/relaxation-exercises/>

Useful website resources for improving mood and relaxation:

<https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/>

<https://www.mhmwales.org.uk/>

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCjzHeG1KWoonmf9d5KBvSiw>

<https://www.headspace.com/> (Also available in app form)

<https://home.unmind.com/> (Also available in app form)

<https://www.thecalmzone.net/>

<https://www.mind.org.uk/>

Feelings after coming home



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A sudden illness such as COVID-19, can be a traumatic experience which can upset and distress us. Traumatic events can arouse powerful and disturbing feelings in us which usually settle in time, without any professional help.

You have been through a traumatic experience such as COVID-19 and may want to understand more about how you are feeling

This section describes the kind of feelings that people have after a trauma, what to expect as time goes on, and mentions some ways of coping and coming to terms with what has happened.

A traumatic event occurs when a person is in a situation where there is a risk of harm or danger to themselves or other people. Situations like this are usually frightening or cause a lot of stress. In such situations, people feel helpless.

Examples of traumatic events include:

- serious accidents or incidents
- being told you have a potentially life-threatening illness

Immediately after a traumatic event, it is common for people to feel shocked, or numb, or unable to accept what has happened or cut off from what is going on around you. When in denial, you can't accept that it has happened, so you behave as though it hasn't. Other people may think that you are being strong or that you don't care about what has happened. Over several hours or days, the feelings of shock and denial gradually fade, and other thoughts and feelings take their place.

People react differently and take different amounts of time to come to terms with what has happened. Even so, you may be surprised by the strength of your feelings.

It is normal to experience a mix of feelings.

Some things that might help:

Give yourself time - It sometimes takes weeks or months to accept what has happened and to learn to live with its effect on you. You may need to grieve about what has happened.

Ask for support - It can be a relief to talk about what happened. You may need to ask your friends and family for the time to do this, at first they may not know what to say or do.

Take some time for yourself - there may be times when you want to be alone or just with those close to you.

Talk it over - Bit by bit, let yourself think about the illness and your experience and talk about it with others. Don't worry if you cry when you talk, it's natural and usually helpful. Take things at a pace that you feel comfortable with.

Get into a routine – Eat regularly and start exercising gently.

Do some 'normal' things with other people when you can. Sometimes you will want to be with other people, digitally or in person when you can but not to talk about what has happened. This can also be part of the healing process.

Take care - After a traumatic illness, people can be distracted and therefore more likely to have accidents. Be careful around the home and when you are driving.

Things that do not help

Bottling up your feelings - Strong feelings are natural. Bottling them up can make you feel worse and can damage your health. Let yourself talk about what has happened and how you feel, and don't worry if you cry.

Taking on too much - You need time to think to go over what happened so you can come to terms with it. Take some time to get back to your old routine.

Drinking or using drugs - Alcohol or drugs can blot out painful memories for a while, but they will stop you from coming to terms with what has happened. They can also cause depression and other health problems.

Making major life changes - Try to put off any big decisions. Your judgement may not be at its best and you may make choices you later regret. Take advice from people you trust.



What else might I notice?

Strong feelings affect your physical health. In the weeks after a major traumatic illness you may find that you:

- cannot sleep / feel very tired
- dream a lot and have nightmares
- have memory problems
- have difficulty thinking clearly
- suffer from headaches
- experience changes in appetite
- experience changes in sex-drive or libido
- feel that your heart is beating faster

When should I get professional help?

Family and friends may be able to see you through this difficult time. Many people find that the feelings that they experience after a traumatic event gradually reduce after about a month. However, you may need to see a professional if your feelings are too much for you, or go on for too long (typically beyond 4-5 weeks after the traumatic event). **You should probably ask your GP for help if:**

- you have no one to share your feelings with
- you can't handle your feelings and feel overwhelmed by sadness, anxiety, or nervousness
- you feel that you are not returning to normal after you have physically recovered
- you have nightmares and cannot sleep
- you are getting on badly with those close to you
- you stay away from other people more and more
- your work is suffering
- those around you suggest you seek help
- you have accidents
- you are drinking or smoking too much, or using drugs to cope with your feelings.

What is post-traumatic stress disorder?

Following a traumatic event, some people experience a particular condition called **post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)**. Symptoms that are most commonly experienced by people with PTSD include:

- re-experiencing the trauma through vivid and distressing memories or dreams
- avoiding situations that remind them of the traumatic event

- feeling numb, as though they don't have the same range of feelings as normal
- being in a state of 'alertness' - watching out for danger.

What professional help is available in Swansea Bay Health Board?

If you are experiencing problems that might be PTSD, you should seek professional help from your GP. Your GP can refer you to the Psychological Therapy Service in the Local Primary Mental Health Service where you will be able to access the most appropriate talking treatment assessed to help alleviate the trauma that you may be experiencing. Your GP may also prescribe you medication to help you cope.

Supporting children within the household

Children are likely to experience a wide range of emotions when someone close to them has been in hospital. For some children this could include anxiety, low mood or upset and children may have found things quite confusing. You may also have noticed a change in your child's behaviour (for example, changes to their sleeping habits or being more clingy). At this difficult time, it is important to keep children included and informed. We have included some information to support this below.

- Talk honestly with your children. Use simple, direct language appropriate to their level of understanding. With a younger child you may need to give information in small chunks.
- Encourage children to ask questions. Check how much they have understood as they may be getting information which is incorrect or distorted from friends or social media and may need some help correcting this misinformation.
- It can help to keep to a routine, especially when there have been big changes. Structured days with regular mealtimes, school work, breaks, playtime, bedtime and remote contact with others can help younger children feel secure.



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Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol
Bae Abertawe
Swansea Bay University
Health Board

Further information and advice around talking to children about illness can be found here:

<https://www.bps.org.uk/sites/www.bps.org.uk/files/Policy/Policy%20-%20Files/Talking%20to%20children%20about%20illness.pdf>

Grief and Bereavement

It can be common to experience feelings of loss or grief during recovery from COVID-19. These may be linked to loss of specific aspects of functioning, for example, the illness may have affected physical functioning and make it more difficult to do things as a result. Or, it could be that you may have witnessed the death of other patients during your stay in hospital, which may have left you with feelings of grief. It could also be that you may have lost friends, relatives or acquaintances to COVID-19 and may be grieving these losses.

If you have experienced a bereavement during your admission, whether this is a close friend or a family member there is support available to help you through this difficult time. It may be that you have been unable to grieve or say goodbye in the usual way due to restrictions of social distancing. There is support available from Swansea Bay Health Board and you can ask any member of the team to advise how you can access this service. This is also available from Cruse Bereavement.

<https://www.cruse.org.uk/>

If you need more information please contact us, and we will get back to you as soon as we can.

Please note that we cannot provide urgent advice or care at this email address or telephone number. Please contact the appropriate service if your query is urgent.

Email: SBU.covidtherapies@wales.nhs.uk

Telephone: (01656) 752975

(office hours 9am-4pm, answer machine available)

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