

BACK TO DAILY LIFE AFTER INTENSIVE CARE

This pamphlet is meant to help you and your loved ones. It contains information and guidance on problems or concerns you may have after transferring out of intensive care or after leaving the hospital.

You were hospitalised in intensive care because you became seriously ill and needed special monitoring and treatment. Perhaps you were so ill or affected by medication that you do not remember anything from your stay at the intensive care ward.

Patients in intensive care often need much time to recover before life returns to normal again. This can also be a demanding time for the patient's loved ones.

Being a patient in intensive care

The intensive care ward is for patients in very critically condition who need constant monitoring and treatment. A critical illness or accident occurs suddenly and is a shocking experience for the patient and loved ones.

Patients in intensive care are often connected to tubes, wires and monitoring equipment as various samples are taken and treatments initiated.

Some patients need help breathing (respirator) for a brief or extended length of time. They often have a tube put in their airway passing past the vocal cords, so they are unable to speak. Their voice will come back after the tube is removed. Sedatives and analgesics are often administered to reduce pain and discomfort. Many patients remember little or nothing from their stay at the intensive care ward due to the drugs they are given or due to the disease itself.

Transferring to the bed ward

Moving from the intensive care ward to a normal bed ward is an important step to recovery. Yet patients and their loved ones often feel insecure when this decision is made. The transition from continuous monitoring to more participation by you as a patient can be a challenge.

The bed ward has more patients and fewer nurses because the patients are more self-reliant. Patients are no longer connected to monitoring equipment, and they are asked to use the bell to call for help. The bed ward focuses on training so the patients can return home as soon as possible.

It is important to talk with a nurse or doctor if you are worried or insecure.

Physical condition

A patient who is seriously ill and bedridden will lose weight and muscle mass. Even small efforts can be exhausting, and it is often hard to believe that the patient will get well. Several factors have significance for how fast a patient recovers; age, previous health status, and the duration and severity of an illness or disease.

Patients who received respiratory treatment will have a sore throat for a few days after the tube is removed from the throat. Their voice can change; it can be hoarse or weaker, and it is difficult to shout or speak loudly. Any such changes will gradually disappear.

Respiratory treatment weakens the breathing muscles and causes more mucus to form in the lungs. You may find that it becomes harder to breathe when you start to breathe on your own again, especially with increased

physical activity. A physical therapist can help you with breathing exercises and instruct you on how to cough up the mucus from the lungs.

Physical therapy will begin at the intensive care ward with passive exercises in bed. The patient will gradually become more involved in the training. The physiotherapist will set up an exercise program personalised to your needs. Ask the physical therapist about what kind of progress you can expect.

It is important to continue training when you get home. It is also a good idea to get started with the everyday activities you were used to doing. One tip is to set small but specific goals each week.

Mood swings

Many patients experience mood swings. They may feel fine one day, then be very sad or down the next day. They are more likely to be irritable and have less patience than before. Some are also depressed after having been seriously ill or sick for a long time. The physical therapy exercises often seem useless, and you may think progress is limited or slow. This can make one feel like a failure, or that life will not ever be the same.

Ups and downs can make you discouraged, so it is important to be realistic in terms of what you can do – here and now. Setting goals that are out of reach can bring disappointment and lack of motivation. The goals must be realistic so your self-esteem gradually increases.

Sleep

Many patients experience a change in their sleeping pattern after a stay at intensive care. It can be difficult for many patients to fall asleep, and when they finally do fall asleep they can wake up several times and sleep restlessly.

You will not need as much sleep if your physical activity level is low. Periods of less sleep are not harmful. Sleep patterns will improve overall as you recover. General advice for getting to sleep is taking a warm bath in the evening and avoiding too much coffee and tea. Instead of lying awake without sleep, you can read a book or listen to the radio.

Some patients come home to vivid and terrifying nightmares after a stay at intensive care, which also makes them afraid to sleep. Such nightmares are a result of the disease and/or the drugs that are part of intensive treatment. They are often a mixture of real experiences and fantasies. If you have such dreams, you should tell the personnel at the bed ward. We also advise talking about your nightmares with your loved ones. Your family can help you separate fact from fantasy.

Food

Patients in intensive care usually get food through a plastic tube that runs through the nose and down into the stomach.

It can be a challenge to start eating normal food again. Swallowing food is difficult for some patients because they have a sore throat from respiratory treatment. Food may taste different due to the drugs you took or are still taking.

It is important to talk with the nursing staff if you have eating problems. It is possible to order special or desired meals, and eating many small meals instead of a few large ones. Nutrition drinks can also be a good supplement at the beginning.

It is important to eat, even if your appetite is not so good.

Family and friends

When a person is seriously ill, it is natural that family and friends are concerned. The relatives have been through days of uncertainty about how things will go. Patients often remember little from their time at intensive care and can have a hard time understanding how sick they were. To help fill the void from their stay, family members can tell the patient about your time at intensive care if you want to know more.

Families can be overprotective during recovery, so they may not let you do everything you want. In other cases, your family members might think you are fully recovered while you yourself feel completely miserable. Different ways of perceiving reality can make it difficult to understand each other. Talk together about your concerns and anxieties. Try to comfort each other and give encouragement – and do nice things together. This will help you process your experience and make it easier to reach a full recovery.

Serious diseases can also affect sexual life. You may lack desire and energy, and the sick person or their partner may be concerned about whether sexual activity is harmful or not. As with all forms of exercise, it is important to feel good and feel comfortable. Maybe you cannot perform as much in the beginning, but this will normalise with time.

Who can help you further?

Your family doctor will be responsible for follow-up after a patient is discharged from the hospital. Feel free to contact your doctor if progress is not going as expected or you are experiencing health problems. If your family doctor is unable to help, you will be referred to another doctor or health care provider for further consultation.

The recovery period after a serious illness can be stressful. Symptoms of stress include sleep disturbances over time, a lack of physical and/or mental energy, poor appetite, mood swings, depression or family problems. If such symptoms are lasting, they should be treated professionally. Your doctor may refer you to a psychologist.

The patient and their loved ones are welcome to contact us at the intensive care ward to take a look at the department and talk about your stay with us.

Tel: 51519138 or 51512760.

GOOD LUCK IN THE FUTURE!

REMEMBER THAT IT TAKES TIME TO RECOVER, BUT IT IS WORTH FIGHTING FOR.