

# Beyond Critical Care

## Recovering from a Critical Illness



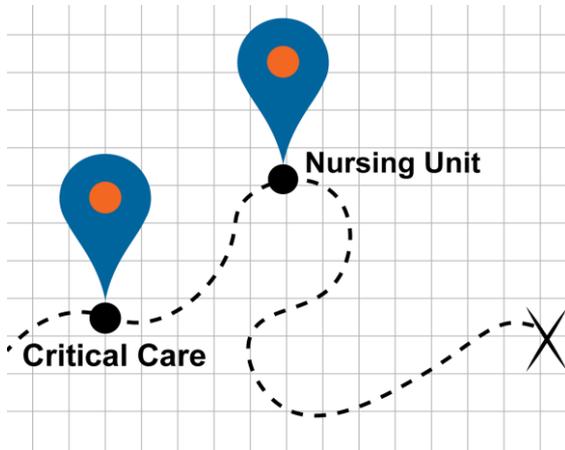
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Although the Critical Care unit has been an essential part of your care, it is only one step along your road to recovery.

We (your doctor and the Critical Care team) feel you have improved enough that you no longer need the specialized care of Critical Care.

The next step in your recovery journey is a move out of Critical Care and onto one of our nursing units.



## **Your move to the Nursing Unit**

Care on a nursing unit is different from in Critical Care. Some people worry about this change. The thought of having to meet new staff and adjust to a different setting with new routines can be stressful.

The team on the unit realize this can be an upsetting time. They are used to caring for people who are recovering from critical illness. To help you settle in, they will give you information about the daily routines such as doctors' rounds, meal times, and visiting.

You will notice a difference between the number of nurses and amount of equipment on the unit and what is in Critical Care.

In Critical Care, there was a lot of medical equipment around your bedside. On the nursing unit, you usually see very little equipment at the bedside, including heart monitors.

In Critical Care, nurses were at your bedside continuously monitoring you. On the nursing unit, nurses care for several people at the same time. They are not always at your bedside. That said, nurses are always nearby and if you need help or want to speak to your nurse anytime, use your bedside call bell.

As part of the move to the unit, your Critical Care team gives your new care team a detailed report about your condition and care. We do this to make sure your care continues seamlessly.

We invite you and your family to take time with your new care team to tell them more about yourself and what is important to you.

## **Your Recovery from Critical Illness**

Recovery from a critical illness takes time. It depends on many things such as the length and severity of your illness, and whether your illness means changes to your lifestyle. Many people make a full recovery. Some people might need medication and further treatment.

We describe here some of the common problems that a person can experience and some ways to help.

### **Amnesia**

Your memory of the time in Critical Care might be hazy or absent. This can be from the illness and/or medications we gave you. Some people never recall exactly what happened in the Critical Care area.

We suggest you write down information and to refer to it until your memory returns to normal.

### **Voice and Breathing**

You might find that your voice sounds husky (probably due to having a breathing tube in your wind pipe). This usually goes away with time.

Your breathing might have changed or is not as strong as before. You might notice wheezing, congestion, or degrees of shortness of breath. Your nurse will check your breathing pattern and rate regularly. Your doctor might order medication to help open up your lung passages and make it easier to breathe.

Respiratory therapists and physiotherapists work with you on ways to strengthen your breathing.

We encourage you to do your deep breathing and coughing exercises once every hour while you are awake.

## **Mood and Memory**

A critical illness is stressful both to the body and the mind. It is common to have some memory problems and fluctuating moods - to feel down one day and up the next. You might feel sad, angry, or other emotions. You might have trouble sleeping, have trouble concentrating, and lack of interest or energy.

These are normal reactions to illness and should lessen with time. It is part of the healing process to have these feelings once in a while, but if they persist, tell us so we can help.

Sometimes, it can feel like your recovery is taking a very long time. Try to stay positive and realistic about what you can do. Ask us what you can reasonably expect to be able to do. Remember we are here to help you with anything you are not sure about.

We suggest you keep a diary or journal of your progress. This can help you focus on your goals and see what you have accomplished.

## **Sleep**

It is common for people to experience changes to their sleeping pattern after a critical illness.

You might have trouble getting to sleep or you might wake up often during the night. Some people experience nightmares or 'flashbacks'. This can be frightening, and you should tell your nurse or doctor.

If you are having any problems sleeping, let us know so we can help.

## **Tiredness and Exercise**

You might find yourself feeling weak and tired. Even though you had physiotherapy and range of motion exercises in Critical Care, you still need time to fully build up your strength again.

Your arms and legs could feel heavy and might be swollen with fluid, making moving around more of an effort. Your joints might feel stiff and painful.

To help with this, a physiotherapist continues to work with you to help you regain muscle strength and mobility. If pain is stopping you from moving around, tell your nurse.

## **Body Image**

As a result of being ill, you could find that your appearance has changed. Your body might look swollen or you might have lost weight. A healthy diet will help restore lost muscle and improve strength.

You might notice changes in your hair or in the texture of your skin. These changes are almost always temporary.

Some people comment about scars and marks left on their skin. These are the result of procedures needed to care for you. Most of these marks will fade and some will disappear over time.

## **Pain**

It is common to have some pain for a number of reasons. You might have existing or chronic conditions that causes pain (such as arthritis). Or you might have pain from recent surgery, injury, or being critically ill.

It is very important that you tell us about any type of discomfort or pain so we can assess and treat it promptly. Most pain can be controlled with medications alone, or in combination with other therapies. Managing your pain well helps you feel better and recover faster.

## **Nutrition**

It is common to have lost your appetite or to notice changes in your sense of taste (such as foods tasting saltier, sweeter, or taking on an unusual metallic taste). These usually get better with time.

A healthy diet is important to your recovery. You might find it easier to eat small amounts often rather than eating a large plate of food. The dietitian can help you with your meal choices and planning.

If you are feeling sick to your stomach (nauseated), tell us so we can give you some medication to help.

## **You and Your Family**

Critical illness is a traumatic event for everyone involved. It is normal to feel stressed, anxious, and tired. It can help to talk with someone about what is happening and sharing your concerns.

Our social worker or a spiritual health practitioner can support you through this. Let your nurse know if you would like to talk with someone.

