What to expect after trauma
Information for patients
Introduction

Among the many reasons people need hospital care are events such as traffic accidents, falls or assaults. We call these ‘traumas’.

When someone experiences a trauma, the events that led to their injuries, as well as the injuries themselves, will have an effect on how they are feeling.

This leaflet may be useful if you want to understand more about your own emotional response.
Feelings

Immediately after trauma, people often talk about feeling ‘numb’ or ‘cut off’ from others. We call this ‘shock’. In the hours and days that follow, a whole range of other feelings can come up.

After trauma, you may experience some of the following feelings.

• Relief that you are in hospital and starting to make progress towards recovery
• Fear that you might be overwhelmed by your feelings or are not yet safe
• Guilt about the harm others may have experienced
• Sadness that you have suffered a bereavement, or perhaps a life-changing injury
• Worry about the financial impact of time off work, or how other people in your family will cope
• Anger with those who may be responsible
• Determination about the active role you need to take in your recovery

After trauma, in addition to physical injuries, you may experience:

• difficulty sleeping
• nightmares
• problems with concentration and clear thinking
• headaches
• changes in appetite
• tearfulness
• being ‘jumpy’ or very agitated.

It is likely that many of these feelings will gradually settle as you begin to adjust and make sense of the experiences you have had.
There are also ways we can help you to cope emotionally, if you are finding it particularly difficult, and some of these are outlined below.

**Memory loss after trauma**

After trauma, particularly following a head injury, people often describe difficulty remembering the events that led to their injuries. These memories may return in time.

Some people prefer to have no memory of their trauma, while others find that recalling snippets of memory – images, smells, sounds – or information about their injuries makes them worry about what might have occurred.

Talking through what happened to you, and exploring the gaps in your knowledge, can be a part of recovery; take it at a pace that feels right for you.

After trauma some people don’t have a sense of the passing of time, and find it challenging to take on new information: this is sometimes called ‘confusion’. During your recovery it might be helpful if family, friends or hospital staff keep a diary of what happens to you each day. This can be a useful reference for you in the future.
Coping in hospital

In the early days, rest is important to help your body and mind to heal. The physiotherapists and nurses looking after you will show you how to rebuild your physical strength and stamina gradually, introducing exercises appropriate for your stage of recovery.

Talking through what happened to you is one way of rebuilding your emotional strength. You may feel comfortable doing this with visiting family or friends, or you may like to speak to a member of the professional team. Take things at your own pace and remember that you may sometimes just want to talk about everyday matters; this is part of the recovery process too.

If you are recovering a long way from home, it can be stressful managing with little contact from family and friends. Alternatively you may feel overwhelmed by the number of visitors, or questions from well-wishers. When this happens, it is useful to name one person as a main contact, who can update others about your recovery.

Additional help with your emotional recovery

For many people, family and friends play a key role in their emotional recovery from trauma.

Within Oxford Major Trauma Centre we also have a Clinical Psychologist and Psychiatrist, who can offer advice and assessment where appropriate. They are part of our Psychological Medicine Team. If you would like to meet them, or discuss your emotional recovery with them, do please tell the nursing staff.
Our Psychological Medicine team

Our team provides a full range of interventions, including ‘talking treatments’ and medication.

**They can help you:**

- make sense of the trauma you experienced, and your emotional response to it
- adjust to changes in how your body looks or works
- prepare for talking to others who may ask questions about your experience
- get the best out of your physical rehabilitation
- make decisions about treatment
- begin to address bereavement.

**They can also:**

- provide specialist assessment following a head injury
- talk to your family about their emotional response to your injuries and hospitalisation
- make assessments of your ability to make complex decisions
- offer medication to relieve some of your symptoms.

For further information about our Psychological Medicine Service, please visit:

[www.ouh.nhs.uk/psychologicalmedicine](http://www.ouh.nhs.uk/psychologicalmedicine)
If you have a specific requirement, need an interpreter, a document in Easy Read, another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01865 221 473** or email **PALS@ouh.nhs.uk**

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