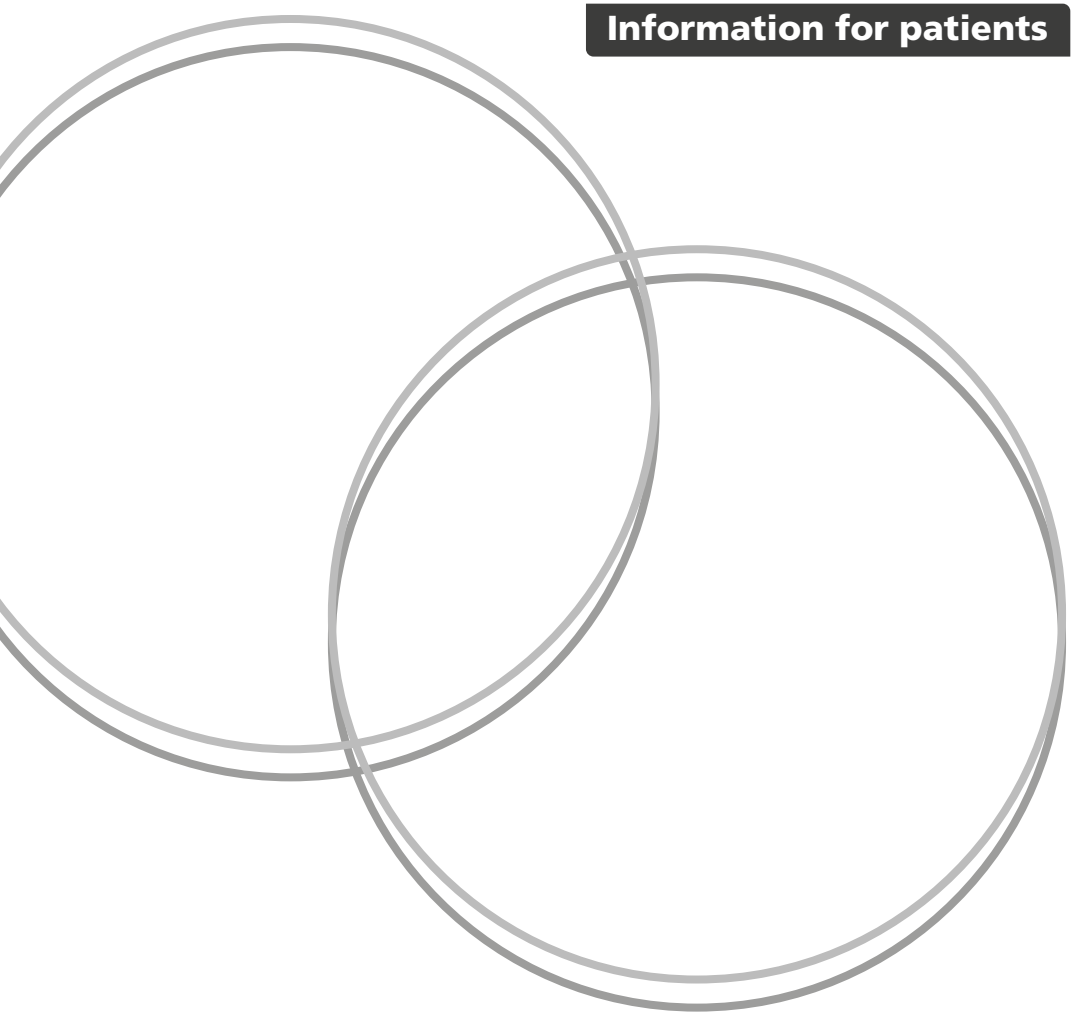
NHS
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Life after discharge from Cardiothoracic Critical Care (CTCCU)

Information for patients



Introduction

This booklet explains some of the common physical, emotional, and psychological experiences that people may have after leaving intensive care. It provides an overview of your stay in the Cardiothoracic Critical Care Unit (CTCCU), what to expect on the ward after discharge from critical care, an introduction to the CTCCU Follow-up Service, and details of the resources and support available to help you during your recovery.

You will also find a section of frequently asked questions (FAQs) that addresses some of the common concerns people have after leaving critical care.

Going to the ward

As your condition improves, the multidisciplinary team (MDT) will assess when you are ready to be transferred from the CTCCU to a ward.

We understand that this can be an anxious time for both you and your family. During your stay in CTCCU, you will have become familiar with the environment, routines, and staff who have been caring for you. Moving to a ward means adjusting to a new setting and meeting a new healthcare team.

Although this transition can feel daunting, it is an important and positive milestone in your recovery. Your care will continue on the ward, where the team will support you as you regain your strength and work towards returning home or moving to a rehabilitation facility. It is completely normal to feel uncertain at this stage, but this transfer is a positive step forward in your recovery journey. If you have any concerns or questions, please speak to a member of staff. They are there to listen, provide reassurance, and support you throughout this next stage of your recovery.

Cardiothoracic Critical Care Unit (CTCCU)

Following a stay in the Cardiothoracic Critical Care Unit (CTCCU), particularly after a prolonged illness, it is common for recovery to take time. You may not feel like your usual self straight away, and this is a normal part of the healing process. Recovery is different for everyone, and it is important to remember that improvement often happens gradually over weeks and months.

During your recovery, you may experience symptoms such as tiredness, weakness, pain, reduced appetite, disturbed sleep, or changes in your mood. Feeling unusually tired is common and may be related to your illness, surgery or your heart not yet working at its full strength. If you have heart failure, this may also contribute to fatigue and breathlessness while you recover. These symptoms usually improve with time, although recovery can vary from person to person.

Some pain or discomfort is also common after cardiothoracic surgery or procedures. Your healthcare team will work with you to manage your pain, as keeping it under control is an important part of your recovery and will help you to move around, breathe deeply, and sleep more comfortably.

You may also be prescribed several new medications after leaving CTCCU. These medicines play an important role in supporting your recovery and preventing complications. Some medications can cause side effects or may take time to get used to. If you experience troublesome side effects or have concerns about your medicines, speak to your healthcare team or pharmacist, who can advise you and make changes if needed.

Cardiothoracic Critical Care Follow-up Service

Who are we?

The CTCCU Follow-up Service is led by a consultant, with dedicated follow-up nurses running the clinics.

Our aim is to support you after you have returned home by helping with any ongoing questions, concerns, or difficulties you may have following your stay in intensive care. While we may not have all the answers, we will do our best to provide advice, reassurance, and signpost you to the most appropriate support where needed.

As we are a small team, we are unable to routinely offer follow-up appointments to every patient. However, if you feel you would benefit from being seen by the CTCCU Follow-up Service, you are welcome to self-refer by scanning the QR code or emailing us.

What does an appointment involve?

Appointments are usually offered around 10–12 weeks after your discharge from the intensive care unit. This allows time for you to have been reviewed by your primary team and to have progressed further in your recovery.

Appointments can take place either face-to-face or remotely, depending on your preference and individual needs. If you would find it helpful, we can also arrange a visit to the CTCCU so that you can revisit the unit and discuss any questions or memories you may have about your stay.

What can the service offer me?

The CTCCU Follow-up Service can offer:

- The opportunity to ask questions about your admission, your stay in intensive care, and your recovery.
- Information to help you better understand why you became unwell and the treatment you received.
- Advice and signposting to community services and other sources of support, where appropriate.
- The opportunity to talk to someone who understands the challenges of recovering after intensive care and explore any concerns you may have.
- The opportunity to share your feedback about your experience in CTCCU to help us improve the care we provide.

Email address: CTCCUFollowUp@ouh.nhs.uk

Self-referral link



Frequently Asked Questions

I feel tired, weak, and low in energy. Will it get better?

Yes. It is common to feel tired, weak, and lacking in energy after a stay in intensive care, particularly if you have been unwell for a long time.

During your illness, you may have lost weight and muscle strength, and your joints may feel stiff. While you were in hospital, the nursing and physiotherapy teams will have supported your recovery and helped you regain your mobility.

Once you are home, gradually increasing your activity can help rebuild your strength. Short, regular walks and gentle exercise, with plenty of rest in between, are often the best way to start. Recovery takes time, and it is important to pace yourself and celebrate small improvements.

Why am I not eating normally?

It is common to have a reduced appetite after an intensive care stay. Changes in taste, feeling full quickly, tiredness, or nausea can all make eating more difficult.

Good nutrition is an important part of healing. Try to eat small, frequent meals and snacks if you are unable to manage large meals. If your appetite does not improve or you are concerned about ongoing weight loss, speak to your GP or hospital team.

Why can’t I sleep at night?

Many people experience sleep problems after leaving intensive care.

While you were in ICU, your care continued throughout the day and night, with regular observations, treatments, and alarms, which can disrupt your normal sleep pattern. It may take some time for your body clock to return to normal.

Sleep usually improves gradually over the weeks and months following discharge. Maintaining a regular bedtime routine, avoiding caffeine late in the day, and keeping physically active during the day may help.

Why can't I remember my stay in ICU?

Memory loss is very common after an intensive care stay.

The medications used for sedation, together with the effects of critical illness, can affect your memory. Some people remember very little about their time in ICU, while others have only scattered memories.

Family members and friends can often help fill in the gaps. Some people also find it helpful to revisit the unit once they have recovered, as this can help them understand what happened and make sense of their experience.

I have been having nightmares or hallucinations. Is this normal?

Yes. Many people experience vivid dreams, nightmares, hallucinations, or confusing memories during or after their stay in intensive care. These experiences can feel very real and may continue for some time after you leave hospital.

For most people, these symptoms improve as they recover. Some people find it helpful to talk about their experiences with family, friends, or a healthcare professional. Visiting the ICU and discussing your stay with the follow-up team may also help you understand what happened and reduce any ongoing worries.

If these symptoms persist, become distressing, or begin to affect your daily life, please speak to your GP as further support may be available.

Life after discharge

Leaving ICU is a major step and you may still not feel yourself, even when you have left hospital. This is not unusual.

It may take time before you are well enough to return to work, your GP will continue to care for you once you are at home and will tell you when you may be ready to return. If your workplace has an occupational health department then it is a good idea to speak to them, as they may have a return-to-work scheme after long-term or serious illness.

Many people worry about when it is safe to resume sexual activities. This should be gradual and will depend on how you are feeling.

You may find that you become tired very easily and you need to take naps in the day and go to bed early. This is quite common and you should follow your body's needs.

You may be referred to a physiotherapist for on-going rehabilitation. This will be discussed with you before you're discharge home.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

Oxford University Hospitals (OUH) Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) is committed to improving the service we give to our patients.

It is a confidential service that aims to:

- Advise and support patients, their families, and their carers
- Listen to patients' concerns, queries and suggestions
- Help sort out problems quickly on your behalf
- Inform patients, their families and their carers about the Trust's Complaints Procedure
- Assist you if you have any concerns about your rights as a patient and how the OUH is fulfilling its part of the NHS Constitution regarding your own care.

Contact details

Tel: **01865 221 473**

Email: PALS@ouh.nhs.uk

Helpful links

Faculty of Intensive Care Medicine

This page provides lots of information for patients and families.



ICU Steps

This page provides information for patients and their families

ICU Steps –for children

This page provides lots of information for parents and tailored information for children.

Further information

If you would like an interpreter, please speak to the department where you are being seen.

Please also tell them if you would like this information in another format, such as:

- Easy Read
- large print
- braille
- audio
- electronic
- another language.

We have tried to make the information in this leaflet meet your needs. If it does not meet your individual needs or situation, please speak to your healthcare team. They are happy to help.

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