

Mental and Emotional

- Sometimes people recovering from a serious illness can feel low, fearful or have trouble concentrating on simple tasks. This can change from one day to the next.
- Set yourself goals for the week that you think you can achieve. Writing down how you feel and what you are doing in a diary can help track your progress.
- Patients and their relatives can experience symptoms of stress, related to their critical illness. This does get better over time. Counselling can help patients and relatives who are worrying all the time or feeling fearful after their stay on the critical care.

Changes in appearance or physical function:

Patients may experience:

- Weight loss
- Muscle weakness and joint stiffness
- Hair, skin and nail changes such as hair loss and scars from tubes and lines
- Voice changes after having a breathing tube in the throat

As your strength returns, you may want to do physical activity, such as swimming, walking or cycling. It is important to start gently at first, and slowly increase. Research suggests that it is more helpful to do a small amount each day rather than push too hard and feel very tired for a long time afterwards.

Patients are encouraged to speak to the team in the recovery clinic about any issues they are experiencing. **Most of these problems return to normal with time.**



Further support

ICU Steps is a registered charity run by former critical care patients and relatives. They aim to improve the care and support available to those recovering from critical illness. There are some excellent resources on their website to explain critical care recovery: icusteps.org.

CRITICAL CARE RECOVERY PROGRAM

Critical Care Department

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Questions to ask



#HealthyNorth

northernhealth.ca

University Hospital of Northern British Columbia



Critical Care Recovery Program in Northern BC

Being critically ill can affect patients in many ways, and recovery may take a long time. The aim of this program is to provide support during the journey to recovery and provide information on what one may experience after critical care.

Recovering after a serious illness

Eating

- Appetite changes – try small, regular meals with healthy snacks in between and eat more slowly
- Changes in food taste – Food may taste different (saltier, sweeter, or metallic). This will likely improve with time.
- A healthy high-protein diet is very important to help in recovery and to regain strength and stamina.
- You can buy specially prepared protein drinks and desserts to help you get the nutrition you need. Speak to your local pharmacist for advice.
- You'll begin to gain weight again as you get better, eat more, and exercise. You will get stronger, but it takes time.

Sleeping

- Sleep patterns can change. You may have difficulty falling asleep and/or frequently wake up through the night.
- As recovery progresses and you become more active, your sleep should get better.
- Some people may experience nightmares and vivid dreams. These are sometimes a side-effect of sedative drugs and usually go away over a few weeks.

What is the Critical Care Recovery Clinic?

Recovery after a stay on the critical care unit can be a long and emotional journey for patients, relatives and their caregivers.

After discharge from the hospital, patients will be contacted to invite them to the recovery clinic. We encourage people to come to clinic in person, but all clinics have a virtual (Zoom or telephone) option if this is preferred.

What will happen at the clinic appointment?



When: 2–3 months after hospital discharge.



What Happens: You can share your story, ask questions, and talk about physical or emotional challenges.



The ICU team learns from patients and families to enhance future care.



Who You'll Meet: A critical care doctor, a nurse, and if needed, a clinical counsellor.



We're here to support your recovery. Depending on how you're doing, we may offer other services or connect you with specialists who can help with physical, or emotional support.



After Your Visit: We'll send a summary to your family doctor. If helpful, we may invite you back at 6 or 12 months.

We'll work with you to figure out what support you may need and connect you to the right services.



Do I have to join the recovery program?

- It is understandable that not all patients want, or need, to have follow up by the critical care team after hospital.
- If you do not require an appointment, please contact the Critical Care Recovery Clinic at:
Tel: 250-565-5770
Email: CCRP@northernhealth.ca
- If you do not receive a phone call for an appointment within two months of going home, please contact us for further support.

Can I visit the Critical Care unit?

Patients attending appointments in person might get a chance to tour the Critical Care unit with a recovery team member. It's a personal choice—some find it helpful for processing their experiences, while others may not want to.