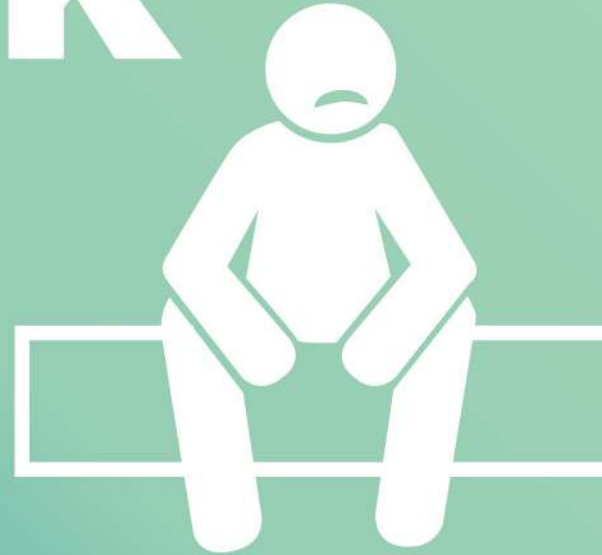


AM I OK?



1

Do you regularly feel **DISCONNECTED** from the relationship of caring for the patient, family, and colleagues?



2

Do you regularly feel **EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION** - like you have nothing left to give?

3

Do you regularly feel **A LACK OF FEELING OF ACCOMPLISHMENT** or feeling **INEFFECTIVE** in what you do?



If you answered **YES** to all three, consider talking to your line manager or someone you trust about the impact of your work.

You may want a referral to your local employee wellbeing service.



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SWITCH OFF, RELAX AND UNWIND

With increased workload and the rapid changes happening currently, we are all likely to experience increased stress levels as healthcare professionals.

If you think of work as being “go-go-go”, this is very activating for your body and mind’s stress response

Wearing PPE, planning, adapting ways of working are all increased demands upon us. There are many things happening right now that feel frustrating and can be upsetting to witness.

You might start to notice knock on impacts such as tension, racing thoughts, inability to switch off.

It is okay if you are not feeling okay

This is a roller coaster....you need to step off at regular intervals.

Time out in work:

- take your breaks! If you can, go for a walk or step outside. If you can't, band covid talk on break
- Try our three-minute breathing space from “Calm and in control”
- look out of the window and pause, take notice of something outside the hospital

Try to find ways to switch off when you are away from work.

Ideas include:

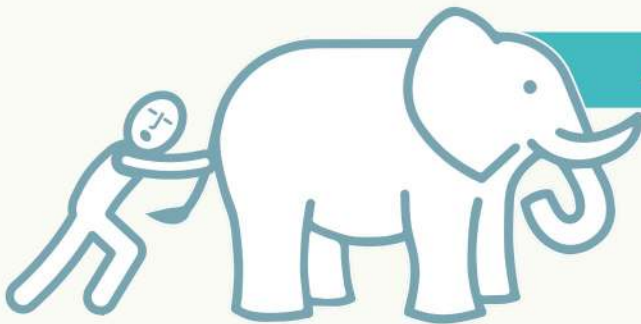
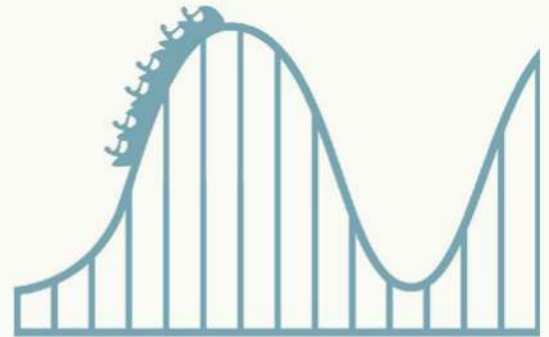
- chat to friends on the phone - and don't talk about covid
- Listen to some relaxation techniques <https://stresscontrolaudio.com/home>
- step away from too much social media and news - try to do this just once a day
- unwind with films, and documentaries - think comedy, nature, light hearted
- get out in the garden

MANAGING YOUR WELLBEING

Striking a balance between the positive factors and resources at work and the negative factors or demands at work isn't always easy. It is normal to have difficult days, but the following can help:

Effective “rollercoaster riding”

Some people describe working in critical care as an emotional rollercoaster, so ways to counter this are important. Remember to take your breaks. Create a few minutes to step away from the unit, take a breath and relax. Outside of work allow enough “down time” where you can switch off.



Acknowledge you are only human

The clinical work can provoke strong emotions. Sometimes when you have other issues outside work, coping with those emotions can feel even harder.

Space to reflect, share and beware using avoidant coping strategies

We see a lot in critical care, and we need space to reflect and make sense of this. Keeping very busy, avoiding discussing things, over-eating, and drinking to excess are all risk factors. Your support networks inside and outside work are good places to discuss the day.



There are times when our psychological wellbeing is so challenged that self-care is not enough. If you are finding things difficult, consider talking to your line manager or someone you trust about the impact of your work.

You may want a referral to your local employee wellbeing service.

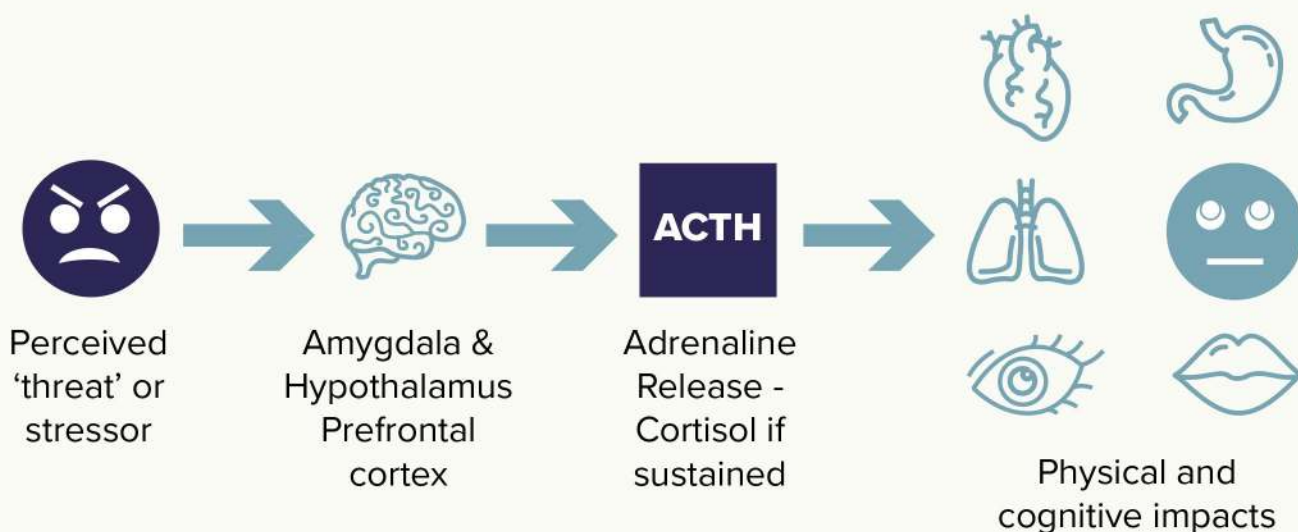
Calm and in control: Managing stress in the ICU - 1

Working in critical care can be busy and stimulating at times, and staff sometimes describe themselves as being in “go-go-go” mode. This is potentially activating for your body and mind’s stress response. This tip sheet will help you to start to understand and manage your stress responses while at work or at home.

The Stress Response

When the brain detects stress in the environment, the body’s stress–response system is activated. This involves the Sympathetic branch of the autonomic nervous system, which leads to a “fight or flight” response. Stress hormones are released, leading to increased heart rate, blood pressure and breathing rate to enable the body to act. This system can be activated even when we are asleep.

There are some individual differences in how people notice the changes in thinking and physical sensations. Many will notice with a manageable level of stress the mind can feel focussed, in higher stress it is hard to think clearly and make decisions. Many will notice the sensation of over-breathing, palpitations, dry mouth, and stomach distress to name a few.



Interrupt the Stress Response

You can interrupt and regulate the stress response. Breathing acts as a biofeedback into the body’s stress response and helps to interrupt the response. Use the following technique to stop your mind from racing:- tell yourself “stop”, focus on your breath for 30 seconds plus, and then try thinking again.



Calm and in control: Managing stress in the ICU - 2

Breathing technique

Try this simple breathing technique to slow down your physiological symptoms of stress/anxiety. It's not relaxation - it will keep you feeling focussed and alert, but calm and in control.

Take a breath in for 3-5 seconds

Release the breath taking 3-5 seconds

Repeat - for a minute

Attention switching Technique

If your mind is still racing, you can also try a distraction technique.

Say to yourself **STOP**, and then take yourself through a mundane task- such as spotting all the green things in the room, going through the alphabet to people's names (Andy, Becky, Carl...etc)

This overloads your working memory with benign thoughts and gives you chance to slow down the body's stress response

Rest and Recover

Working in Critical Care can feel like a roller coaster.... you need to step off at regular intervals. The Parasympathetic branch of the autonomic nervous system helps you to recover from acute stress. Taking time to engage in restful and enjoyable activity and connecting with others can be helpful.

Take time out in work: take your breaks! If you can, go for a walk or step outside. Look out of the window and pause, take notice of something outside the hospital.



Chronic Stress

If the body's stress system is stimulated often, such as on a daily basis, it can lead to problems. High levels of cortisol can suppress the immune response, there have been links to chronic health problems, and mental health problems. It can be hard to recognise when you are chronically stressed, but symptoms include:

PHYSICAL

- headaches or dizziness
- muscle tension or pain
- stomach problems
- chest pain or a faster heartbeat
- sexual problems

THINKING

- difficulty concentrating
- struggling to make decisions
- feeling overwhelmed
- constantly worrying
- being forgetful

BEHAVIOURAL

- being irritable and snappy
- sleeping too much or too little
- eating too much or too little
- avoiding certain places or people
- drinking or smoking more

If you recognise these symptoms in yourself or others, it may be time to take stock of ongoing stressors in your life, and talk to someone in confidence to consider what you need.

A Mindful Minute at your workstation



Begin by bringing your attention into your body

Feeling the weight of your body

Push down through your feet

Connecting yourself with the floor in the present moment

Scan across your body and notice any tension

Take a moment to loosen the tension, to relax

Let your shoulders be soft

Be aware of your whole body, as best you can in this moment

Now focus on your breath

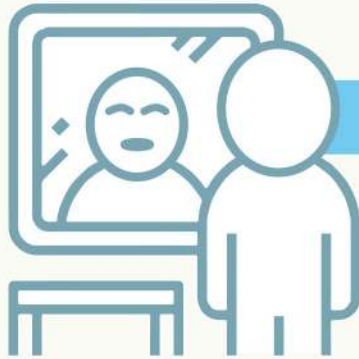
Take a few deep breaths

Connecting yourself with the rhythm of your breathing

Bring your attention back to your workstation

HOW TO APPROACH SELF-CARE

Your health and wellbeing matter. In the context of working in a busy critical care unit the following may be helpful.



Self-awareness is important

There will always be that one case that has a greater impact, often because there is something that you connect to. Be aware of the things that may bother you, and your own warning signs of stress.

General self-care

Take time for the things that bring you rest and joy.



Self-compassion and embrace uncertainty

Beware your own critical eye. Working in healthcare is hard and there are times when you will feel there is nothing you can do, or you cannot control the situation. Be kind to yourself and your colleagues.



There are times when our psychological wellbeing is so challenged that self-care is not enough. If you are finding things difficult, consider talking to your line manager or someone you trust about the impact of your work.

You may want a referral to your local employee wellbeing service.



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End of Shift Wellbeing Checklist

Just as you prepare psychologically to start work, you need to help your mind to psychologically leave work behind at the end of a shift

- ✓ Take a moment to think about today
- ✓ Acknowledge the things that were difficult
- ✓ Purposefully let each of them stay behind as you prepare to leave
- ✓ Consider the things you felt pleased about, however small

Thank you for the tremendous work you do, every day

- ✓ Choose an action that signals the end of your working day
- ✓ This may be taking off your uniform or putting your key in your car
- ✓ Switch attention to what you will do when you get home

How will you rest and recharge?

People vary in how they cope with shift work depending on their health, fitness, age, lifestyle, and responsibilities at home. There are ways to make shift work more tolerable.

Driving to and from work

Driving to and from work can be risky, particularly after a long shift, a night shift or before an early start. The following strategies may make driving safer:

- Consider alternatives for travel: using public transport
- Exercise briefly before your journey- take a brief walk
- Stop if you feel sleepy and take a short nap if it is safe to do so

Identify a suitable sleep schedule

Most adults need 7-8 hours sleep a day although this may decrease with age. If you cannot do this, try to rest, as this is still beneficial.

- If you work regular shifts, try going to bed at different times e.g. soon after you arrive back from work or stay up and sleep before the next shift
- Have a short sleep before your first night shift
- If coming off night shifts, have a short sleep and go to bed earlier that night
- Try to keep to a sleep schedule that works for you.

Techniques to promote sleep

- Go for a short walk, relax with a book, listen to music and/or take a hot bath before going to bed.
- Avoid vigorous exercise before sleep as it is stimulating and raises the body temperature.
- Avoid caffeine, 'energy' drinks and other stimulants a few hours before bedtime. Choose foods that are easy to digest such as pasta, rice, bread, salad, fruit, vegetables and milk products
- Don't go to bed feeling hungry: have a light meal or snack before sleeping.
- Avoid alcohol as it lowers the quality of sleep.
- An unhealthy lifestyle combined with shift work may increase the likelihood of sleep disorders and sleep loss or exacerbate existing sleep problems. A good diet, regular meals and exercise can improve sleep quality, health and well-being.



Make the environment favourable for sleeping

- Sleep in your bedroom and avoid using it for other activities such as watching television, eating and working
- Create darkness- use heavy curtains, blackout blinds
- Switch off your phone
- Ask your household not to disturb you
- Consider using earplugs, white noise or background music to mask external noises.
- Make sure the temperature is comfortable, cool conditions improve sleep.

Alertness at Work

On some shifts, such as nights and very early mornings you may find it difficult to remain alert and this can affect your performance. It may also increase the risk of errors, injury and accidents. You may find it helpful to:

- Take moderate exercise before starting work which may increase your alertness during the shift.
- Keep the light bright if possible
- Take regular short breaks during the shift if possible.
- Get up and walk around during breaks.
- Plan to do more stimulating work at the times you feel most drowsy.

Look for further useful resources: <https://anaesthetists.org/Fatigue>

Job Burnout in Intensive Care

Burnout is not a medical diagnosis but is a multifaceted syndrome consisting of exhaustion, depersonalisation and reduced accomplishment.

It is a chronic state of being tired, cynical, and discouraged and is in many ways the opposite to feeling engaged with work. Burnout is a response to the social and work environment and it is an occupational phenomenon (ICD-11).

It is important to note, individuals may show elements of what characterises burnout, but researchers consider these to be different problems, as illustrated below:



High burnout:	high fatigue	high depersonalisation	low sense of accomplishment
Disengaged:		high depersonalisation	
Overextended:	high fatigue		
Ineffective:			low sense of accomplishment
High engagement:	low fatigue	low depersonalisation	high sense of accomplishment

Recognise job burnout in yourself

1. Do you recognise a continued state of high exhaustion and fatigue?

- Feeling drained throughout the working week
- You feel you have nothing left to give
- You feel not refreshed by rest

2. Do you recognise reduced personal accomplishment at work?

- You feel less able to deal with patients' feelings or problems
- You feel less able to enthuse about your job
- You feel like you are not accomplishing much

3. Do you recognise an increased sense of depersonalisation?

- You feel disconnected from your patients
- You find yourself being cynical or sarcastic
- You find yourself being unkind to colleagues

Recognise Contributing Factors

Burnout is caused by multiple interacting work factors including overload and high demands, lack of autonomy and control, problems in co-worker relationships and a sense of belonging, equality and fairness.

- **Moral distress:** if you find yourself in situations where what feels the ethically correct action to take is different from what you are tasked with or able to deliver or if policies or procedures prevent you from doing what you think is right this is likely to influence your sense of accomplishment, you may try harder to compensate (leading to fatigue) or you may disconnect to cope leading to cynicism.
- **Traumatic exposure:** ICU staff are exposed to high levels of psychological trauma. Sometimes people disconnect to manage this trauma, leading to cynicism
- **Lack of control.** Do you have a sense of autonomy at work? An inability to influence decisions that affect your job could lead to job burnout.
- **Lack of resources:** A lack of the resources you need to do your work may lead to you trying harder to compensate and increasing levels of fatigue. It may also impact your sense of accomplishment.
- **Unclear job expectation:** If you are unclear about the degree of authority you have or what others expect from you it can make it hard to know where to focus.
- **Dysfunctional workplace dynamics:** How are relationships at work, with your co-workers and you managers? Perhaps you feel undermined by colleagues, or a manager micromanages your work.
- **Extremes of activity:** Are demands consistently higher than resources? When a job is either monotonous or chaotic, you need constant energy to remain focused. The unpredictable clinical nature of an ICU can make it hard to regulate the extremes of activity – which can lead to fatigue and job burnout.
- **Values mis-alignment:** Do the ICU values and your values align? Value alignment is important for job satisfaction, meaning and belonging in work
- **Fairness and the psychological contract of work:** Are things dealt with in fair and equal ways in work? Feeling fairness of opportunity contributes to a sense of accomplishment. Feeling like you need to try harder to prove yourself risks higher levels of fatigue and cynicism.
- **Lack of social support:** If you feel isolated at work and in your personal life, you might feel more stressed as there are a lack of people to support you and help you make sense of what you experience.
- **Work-life imbalance:** If your work takes up so much of your time and effort that you don't have the energy to spend time with your family and friends, you might burn out quickly.

Act to reduce burnout

Managing Fatigue

Manage the basics such as your shift pattern, sleep, diet and exercise. Consider what is important in your role and what to focus on. Consider how much the role takes from you as well as what it gives you and re-prioritise. Discuss the what your managers expect of you and what is possible. Look at our resources around managing shift work.

Managing Depersonalisation

Find ways to re-engage with why you do what you do. In ICU being involved in follow up clinics and ICU Steps groups can remind you why we do the work we do.

Managing a sense of accomplishment

Discuss with your team leader or manager what are the expectations of you in your role. Try to set goals. Make sure you have your annual appraisal and link this to your career needs. Evaluate your options and whether this role can offer you any further sense of accomplishment.

Seek support

ICU staff sometimes try hard to do things alone. However, our work is challenging, and there is no shame in asking for help from peers, your manager, or professional psychological support. Please look at the Wellbeing Hub on www.ics.ac.uk for options of psychological support.

Managing Bereavement

In Critical Care we are exposed to a lot of death, and some staff have learnt ways of “shelving” their feelings and reactions to this. When staff have a personal bereavement, it can be very hard as staff sometimes do not know how to respond, and we can sometimes be hard on ourselves for having difficult feelings.

These are some of the common feelings in bereavement

- You may feel no-one understands what you are going through.
- You may feel a range of emotions: sadness, anger, confusion, hopelessness. All of these are normal and may come and go.
- It may feel hard to believe, as though the person who died is going to walk in the room.
- You may feel overwhelmed and unable to move much, concentrate or communicate well.
- You may find you get stressed or panicky about things that normally you could cope with.
- You may feel jumpy, tense, or restless. You may struggle with sleep and eating.

Taking Care of Yourself:

- **Reach out to friends and family:** Someone who can offer support and listen can offer great comfort. Staying connected to others is important.
- **Be kind to yourself:** Grieving during this pandemic comes with additional stresses that we all face. Beware unhelpful self-critical thoughts such as “I should be better at this”, and be kind to yourself
- **Feelings Fluctuate:** Most people Struggle to stay in “Grief” the whole time. You will find you may fluctuate between feeling the loss of your loved one (and looking at photos, crying, talking about them) and more “restorative” activities (such as spending time on hobbies, talking about other things). This can be helpful, and is a natural part of grieving.
- **Get the basics right:** Try to eat a little and often, and eat what you want, when you feel like it. Remember to stay hydrated. Sleep when you can, even if only for a few hours at a time.



- **Think about what your loved one would say to you, if they could.** Imagining a conversation with the person who has died can sometimes be helpful, and it helps you to think of ways of coping that they would encourage. This exercise may not work for everyone, so only do it if it appeals to you.

Grief will often follow a natural course and heal over time. However for some staff who have learnt to halt their emotions, it can help to engage in active ways to remember the person who passed away.

- **Ways of remembering:** You may want to do things that help you remember the person who has died. Some people find it helpful to create memory boxes, or frame photographs, or writing a letter.
- **Do something that mattered to you both:** Reading their favourite book, listening to music they loved, or watching their favourite film. Cook the food you liked to eat together, take a walk to your favourite place. Plant your favourite flower or bush and have a place to remember them.

The pain of loss may not go, but over time you will feel more able to manage it.

Below are some really useful support phone numbers and contacts if you wish to talk to someone during this time

- **Cruse Bereavement Care:** National Free phone Helpline **0808 808 1677**.
- **Mind:** Infoline: **0300 123 3393**. Email: info@mind.org.uk. Text: 86463.
- **Bereavement Advice Centre:** Telephone: **08006 349 494**. Free phone offering advice on all aspects of bereavement from registering the death and finding a funeral director through to probate, tax and benefit queries.

Working in critical care, staff are often exposed to stressful events.

A staff member is likely to experience that event as traumatic if they felt overwhelmed or under threat or witnessed this sense of threat to others.

About 1 in 4 to 6 of individuals who experience a potentially traumatic event go on to develop Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and the estimated UK prevalence is 3%. Most individuals recover with time.

Common reactions to traumatic events

The following responses are commonly experienced in the first few weeks following the experience:-

- Emotional reactions such as feeling afraid, sad or low in mood, horrified, helpless, overwhelmed, angry, confused, numb or disorientated
- Distressing thoughts and images that just pop into your head
- Nightmares and/ or disturbed sleep

Reactions are likely to be the strongest in those closest to the incident.

These responses are an expected part of recovery and are the mind's mechanisms of trying to make sense and come to terms with what happened. They should subside over time.

What can people do to cope?

The most helpful way of coping is to be with people you feel close to and normally spend time with. Try to return to everyday routines and habits where possible. Look after yourself, taking time to get the basic right: eat and sleep well, exercise and relax. Try to spend some time doing something that feels good and that you enjoy.

If it helps, talk to someone you feel comfortable with about how you are feeling. Talk at your pace and share only what you want to. Take time to allow any feelings out. Try to acknowledge it may take a while to get back to normal.

Although it can help to chat with colleagues about what you have been through, staff are discouraged from systematic debriefing of such incidents. Some staff can become worse if encouraged to talk if they do not want to.

Support from Others

As a team member or manager, it can be tempting to rush to rescue and provide a "debrief" but if enforced or led by untrained people it can be damaging. However, there are ways to enable staff to "process" the trauma.

- Communicate well with your staff, especially if there have been any processes activated as a result of the incident (such as an RCA).
- Allow the member of staff to work in lower stress areas if they wish.

- Encourage more naturalistic ways of sharing stories, having conversations, shift huddles to encourage peer support.
- Don't rush to pathologize or use terms such as "PTSD". Remember that although this is stressful and many may initially react with stress, most people do recover using their own natural resources, and this can take up to one month. Encourage those still struggling one month later to access help.

When should a person seek more help?

In the early stages, psychological professional help is not usually necessary or recommended. Many people recover naturally within a month.

However, some people may need additional support to help them cope. For example, people who have had other traumatic events happen to them, have a lot of recent stress, and people with previous mental health difficulties may be more vulnerable.

After a month it is more troubling if people continue to experience the following symptoms:-

- Feeling upset and fearful most of the time
- Acting very differently to before the trauma
- Not being able to function such as work or look after the home and family
- Having relationship difficulties
- Using drugs or drinking too much
- Feeling very jumpy and having many nightmares
- Still not being able to stop thinking about the incident
- Still not being able to enjoy life

These sustained responses might attract a diagnosis of PTSD, but it is best to consider this in the context of a trained professional.

What kind of help is available?

Trauma focussed psychological therapies can be helpful in a person's recovery from more serious responses to trauma.

Contact your GP, Occupational Health Services, or look at our ICS Wellbeing Hub to gain access to professional help.