

Patient & Family Guide
2026

After the Intensive Care Unit (ICU)

QE II Department
of Critical Care
(3A and 5.2 ICU)



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www.nshealth.ca

After the ICU

Moving out of the ICU

- You were in the ICU because you needed care for a critical illness.
 - › Now that you are getting better, your ICU health care team knows you are ready to move to a nursing unit at the QE II, or to another facility. This is a big step in your recovery.

What to expect on the new unit

- Your new unit will have different routines and equipment than the ICU.
 - There will be less nurses, and they will care for more than 1 patient at a time.
 - Your nurse will explain how to contact them from your bed or room when you need help.
 - Your health care team on this unit will answer any questions you may have about what to expect, like:
 - › What will your care be like?
 - › How do doctors' rounds work, and when do they happen?
 - › When are meals?
 - › When are visiting hours?
- Please ask your team any questions you may have about your care.

- Your health care team will keep supporting you as needed. This team includes:
 - › Physiotherapists
 - › Respiratory therapists
 - › Social workers
 - › Spiritual care

Your recovery

- Recovery from critical illness takes time. It is different for everyone. What it will be like for you depends on different things, like:
 - › Your health before you were admitted to the hospital
 - › How severe (bad) your illness is
 - › What medications you took during your illness
 - › Your recovery goals

You may see changes in your body and mind. **Here are some common challenges you may have, and some things you can do to help manage them:**

Memory and thinking

- Your memory of your ICU stay may be foggy, or you may not remember it at all.
 - › Your family and support persons can help tell you what happened if you do not remember.
- Writing down your thoughts about your hospital stay and keeping track of your recovery in a journal can help.

Sleep

- It may be hard to fall asleep or stay asleep.
- Nightmares about the ICU are common. This can be scary or upsetting. You may still have them after you go home.
- Ask your health care team for help dealing with any sleep problems you have.

Your mood and feelings

- Having a critical illness and being in the hospital is very stressful. At times, you may feel:
 - › Tired
 - › Angry
 - › Irritable
 - › Scared
 - › Like you do not care about things in your life
 - › Worried or anxious

These feelings are common. They should get better over time.

- Things that may help are:
 - › Talking to your support persons about your feelings
 - › Treatments like counselling or medications
 - › Writing about your recovery in a journal. This can help you focus on your recovery goals. It can also give you a place to write down any questions for your health care team.

It is very important to:

- › talk with your health care team about your feelings and about any concerns you may have about your care.
- › ask your team for help if you need it.

Breathing changes

- Your breathing may feel weaker than it did before your illness.
- You may need to take medication or do breathing exercises. Respiratory therapists and physiotherapists can teach you exercises to strengthen and improve your breathing.
- Your voice may be raspy or sound deeper after being on a breathing machine. This should go away over time.

Weakness

- You may feel weaker.
- Your arms and legs may ache or feel heavy.
- Your joints may be stiff.
- Moving around can help. Talk with your health care team about making a plan to help your movement.

Pain

- Most pain can be managed. **It is very important to tell your health care team about any pain you have.** They will help treat and manage your pain.
- Managing your pain is a very important part of your recovery. It can help you sleep, stay active, and be social. These things all help your recovery.

Changes in your body

- Having a critical illness can change your body in different ways. This is common. You may:
 - › have swelling.
 - › lose muscle.
 - › gain or lose weight.
 - › have scars and bruises from treatments (most will fade over time).
- Eating well and staying active will help your body heal.

Other things you can do to help your recovery:

- **Ask questions.** Write down questions for your health care team in the notes space at the end of this pamphlet or in your journal.
- **Eat well.** Healthy foods (like fruits, vegetables, protein foods) help your body heal.
- **Rest.** Sleep is important for recovery.
- **Move your body.** Moving and exercise helps your strength and improves mood.
- **Write things down.** A journal can help you keep track of your feelings. It can also help you see your progress so that you can celebrate different steps in your recovery.
- **Talk to someone.** You are not alone. Support is available to help you.
 - › Leaving the ICU is a big step, and recovery can take time. Talk to your health care team if you or your support persons feel overwhelmed.

Notes:

This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

Find all patient education resources here:
www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time:
Call 811 or visit: <https://811.novascotia.ca>

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