

## Patient information factsheet

# What to expect after a major trauma

We have given you this factsheet because you have recently experienced a major trauma and have been cared for by our major trauma team at University Hospital Southampton NHS Foundation Trust (UHS). It contains important information about what to expect after a major trauma and who to contact if you need additional support.

### What is a major trauma?

A major trauma is an injury or a combination of injuries that are either life-threatening or life-changing (if the trauma results in long-term disability).

Examples of a major trauma include:

- a significant road traffic collision
- a traumatic amputation of one or more limbs
- an injury that results in paralysis (the loss of the ability to move some or all of your body)
- a traumatic event that you were involved in where someone has died
- a traumatic event in which you thought you were going to die

### The impact of experiencing a major trauma

Everyone responds to trauma differently. However, it is common for people to experience one, some or all the following symptoms after experiencing a major trauma:

- sleep problems (for example, finding it hard to fall or stay asleep or having nightmares)
- intrusive thoughts and memories (thoughts and memories that disturb your mood or your life in a way you do not like)
- flashbacks (reliving aspects of the traumatic event or feeling as if it is happening now)
- low mood and emotions that you find difficult to cope with
- anxiety
- hypervigilance (when you are very alert and aware of your surroundings, and you are unable to relax because you feel something bad might happen)
- getting little to no pleasure from things that you normally enjoy
- loss of memory (being unable to remember parts of or all of the traumatic event)
- avoiding memories, thoughts, feelings, things, people, and places associated with the traumatic event

It is normal to experience these symptoms for four to six weeks after a major trauma. Most people will find that their symptoms improve over time, without the need for any treatment. However, if you continue to experience these symptoms after six weeks, or they get any worse or interfere with your daily life, you should contact your general practitioner (GP) for advice. This may be a sign that you have developed a mental health condition called post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and may need extra support. For more information about PTSD, visit: [www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd](http://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd)

## How to care for yourself after a major trauma

We have included some self-care tips below which may help you to cope with the effects of a major trauma.

### Give yourself time

It can take time to recover from a major trauma and it may take you a while to accept what has happened or to learn to live with it. If someone has died or you have lost something significant to you, you may also need time to grieve. Try not to put pressure on yourself to feel better straight away.

### Talk about the major trauma

Research has shown that talking about the major trauma and your feelings can help you to understand what happened to you. Avoiding memories and feelings has been shown to make people feel worse.

### Ask your family and friends for support

Your family and friends may be able to help you in lots of different ways. For example, they may be able to help with practical issues, such as cooking and cleaning or helping with personal care or financial issues, or just be there for you.

### Avoid spending lots of time alone

Being around other people can make you less likely to experience poor mental health after a major trauma. If you live alone, you may want to consider temporarily moving in with family or friends while you recover. Regular phone and video calls can also be very helpful.

### Stick to a daily routine

Sticking to a daily routine will help with your recovery and make you feel more settled. Eating and exercising regularly and getting enough sleep will also help.

### Keep a diary of how you are feeling

It is normal to have lots of difficult and conflicting emotions after a major trauma. Writing down these emotions can help you to make sense of them.

### Ask your employer for support

You may need to take some time off work or adjust your way of working after a major trauma. Most employers will be willing to support you with any reasonable adjustments. However, if you experience any work-related difficulties, contact Onward for advice using the details at the end of this factsheet.

### Take care

After a major trauma, you are more likely to have accidents. Take more care around your home and when you are driving.

Avoid using alcohol or recreational drugs as a way of coping, as this won't help your recovery in the long term. If you feel you need additional support with this and you live in Southampton or Hampshire, please visit the following websites:

- [www.inclusionhants.org](http://www.inclusionhants.org)
- [www.nolimitshelp.org.uk/drug-and-alcohol-support-hub](http://www.nolimitshelp.org.uk/drug-and-alcohol-support-hub)
- [www.changegrowlive.org/drug-alcohol-service-southampton/info](http://www.changegrowlive.org/drug-alcohol-service-southampton/info)

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## Avoid finding out information about the traumatic event yourself

For many people, watching the news or reading about the traumatic event can cause additional distress. If there is information you wish to find out, try asking a family member or friend to find out for you and then they can tell you in a more supportive way.

## How to manage flashbacks and intrusive memories

To help manage any flashbacks or intrusive memories, we recommend trying the different coping techniques and methods below and seeing which ones work best for you.

- **The butterfly hug technique**

[www.traumaresearchuk.org/the-butterfly-hug-technique](http://www.traumaresearchuk.org/the-butterfly-hug-technique)

To watch a video on how to perform this technique, please scan the QR code below or visit: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=e-VHaKRjgNE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e-VHaKRjgNE)



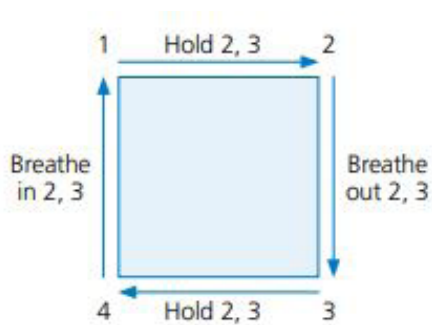
- **The 54321-grounding technique**

[www.traumaresearchuk.org/the-54321-grounding-technique](http://www.traumaresearchuk.org/the-54321-grounding-technique)

- Name **5** things you can see.
- Touch **4** things close to you.
- Name **3** things you can hear.
- Name **2** things you can smell.
- Name **1** thing you can taste.

- **The square breathing technique**

[www.traumaresearchuk.org/the-breathing-technique](http://www.traumaresearchuk.org/the-breathing-technique)



- **Calming breathing technique**

[www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/guides-tools-and-activities/breathing-exercises-for-stress](http://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/guides-tools-and-activities/breathing-exercises-for-stress)

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- Keep a diary to hand so you can write down what happened during the flashback as soon as you can. Try to make a note of how you felt during the flashback (for example, hot, cold or shivery).
- Keep a record of any possible flashback triggers (for example, sounds, smells or being touched).
- Talk to your loved ones about how you are feeling. They may be able to offer suggestions on how they can help you.

## Additional support for coping with a major trauma

### Talking therapies

If you contact your GP for advice, they may recommend talking therapies. Talking therapies, or psychological therapies, are effective and confidential treatments delivered by fully trained and accredited NHS practitioners. They can help if you are struggling with things like feelings of depression, excessive worry, social anxiety or PTSD.

You can access talking therapies for free on the NHS. You can refer yourself directly to an NHS talking therapies service without a referral from a GP, or a GP can refer you. Scan the QR code below or click the following link to find your local NHS talking therapies service:

[www.nhs.uk/service-search/mental-health/find-an-NHS-talking-therapies-service](http://www.nhs.uk/service-search/mental-health/find-an-NHS-talking-therapies-service)



For more information about NHS talking therapies, including the different types available, please visit: [www.nhs.uk/mental-health/talking-therapies-medicine-treatments/talking-therapies-and-counselling/types-of-talking-therapies](http://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/talking-therapies-medicine-treatments/talking-therapies-and-counselling/types-of-talking-therapies)

### Onward

Onward has partnered with UHS and the Wessex Trauma Network to support people in hospital with a serious injury or illness. The aim of the partnership is to ensure you receive the support you need, when you need it most. As a not-for-profit organisation, all the services are free and designed to supplement NHS care.

Onward can provide:

- benefits support
- case management support
- counselling support
- peer support
- financial support
- legal support

Telephone: **0300 131 1333**

Email: [help@onward.org.uk](mailto:help@onward.org.uk)

Website: [www.onward.org.uk](http://www.onward.org.uk)

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## PTSD UK

Website: [www.ptsduk.org](http://www.ptsduk.org)

## Trauma Research UK

Website: [www.traumaresearchuk.org](http://www.traumaresearchuk.org)

Crisis2Calm video: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=-qXGtdwrgo0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-qXGtdwrgo0) (or scan the QR code below)



## Hampshire and Isle of Wight Air Ambulance aftercare team

The Hampshire and Isle of Wight Air Ambulance aftercare team are here to support you and your family beyond the point of serious injury or illness.

Telephone: **023 8120 1443**

Email: [HEMSAftercare@uhs.nhs.uk](mailto:HEMSAftercare@uhs.nhs.uk)

To find out more, scan the QR code below or visit:

[www.hiowaa.org](http://www.hiowaa.org)

[www.uhs.nhs.uk](http://www.uhs.nhs.uk)



## If you need help or support quickly

- Contact your GP for support.
- Contact your mental health team directly if you have one.
- Call NHS **111** if you are in crisis and feel you cannot keep yourself safe.

For support and someone to talk to any time of day or night, contact Samaritans on **116 123**.

## Useful links

[www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd](http://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd)

[www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/mental-illnesses-and-mental-health-problems/coping-after-a-traumatic-event](http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/mental-illnesses-and-mental-health-problems/coping-after-a-traumatic-event)

[www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/coping-with-traumatic-events](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/coping-with-traumatic-events)

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[www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/trauma/coping-with-trauma](http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/trauma/coping-with-trauma)

[www.wessextraumanetwork.com/patients](http://www.wessextraumanetwork.com/patients)

If you are a patient at one of our hospitals and need this document translated, or in another format such as easy read, large print, Braille or audio, please telephone **0800 484 0135** or email **patientsupporthub@uhs.nhs.uk**

For help preparing for your visit, arranging an interpreter or accessing the hospital, please visit **www.uhs.nhs.uk/additionalsupport**