

How to get help?

If it has been over a month since you left hospital and you continue to feel concerned about how you are feeling and coping, it may be useful to ask for further support.

You can discuss accessing such services with your GP.

Additionally, North West Boroughs Healthcare have a **new 24/7 crisis line** to support people's mental health.

People living in Halton, Knowsley, St Helens and Warrington who are experiencing a mental health crisis they can access a dedicated mental health crisis line on **01925 275 309**. This is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to people of all ages, including children and young people, who need urgent mental health support

Whiston Hospital
Warrington Road,
Prescot, Merseyside, L35 5DR
Telephone: 0151 426 1600



/sthknhs



@sthk.nhs

www.sthk.nhs.uk

Emotional support following COVID -19

This leaflet can be made available
in alternative languages / formats on request.

如有需要，本传单可提供其他语言/版式
此單張的其他語言/格式版本可按要求提供

Na żądanie ta ulotka może zostać udostępniona
w innych językach/formatach.

Author: Clinical psychologist
Department: Clinical Psychology
Document Number: STHK1422
Version: 1
Review date: 01 / 05 / 23

This booklet is for people who have recently been discharged from hospital following treatment for COVID-19.

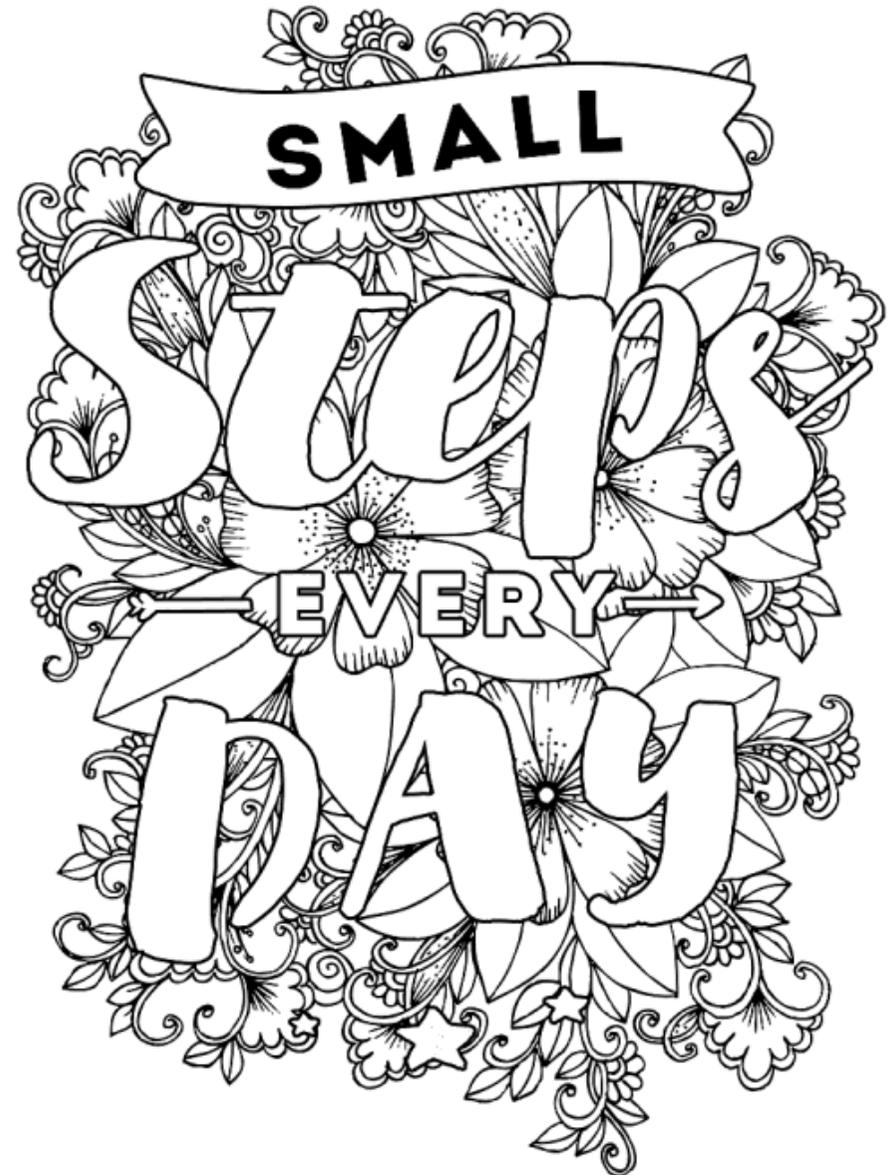
Any hospital stay can be a difficult experience both for the patient and also for their family and friends.

A hospital admission under unexpected and / or frightening circumstances, such as this current pandemic, can be especially difficult. The treatment people have, the things they see, hear, feel and think, can all have an impact on their emotional wellbeing.

Understandably, most peoples' focus when discharged is on their physical recovery. However, emotional and psychological recovery is equally important and paying attention to this can also benefit physical health.

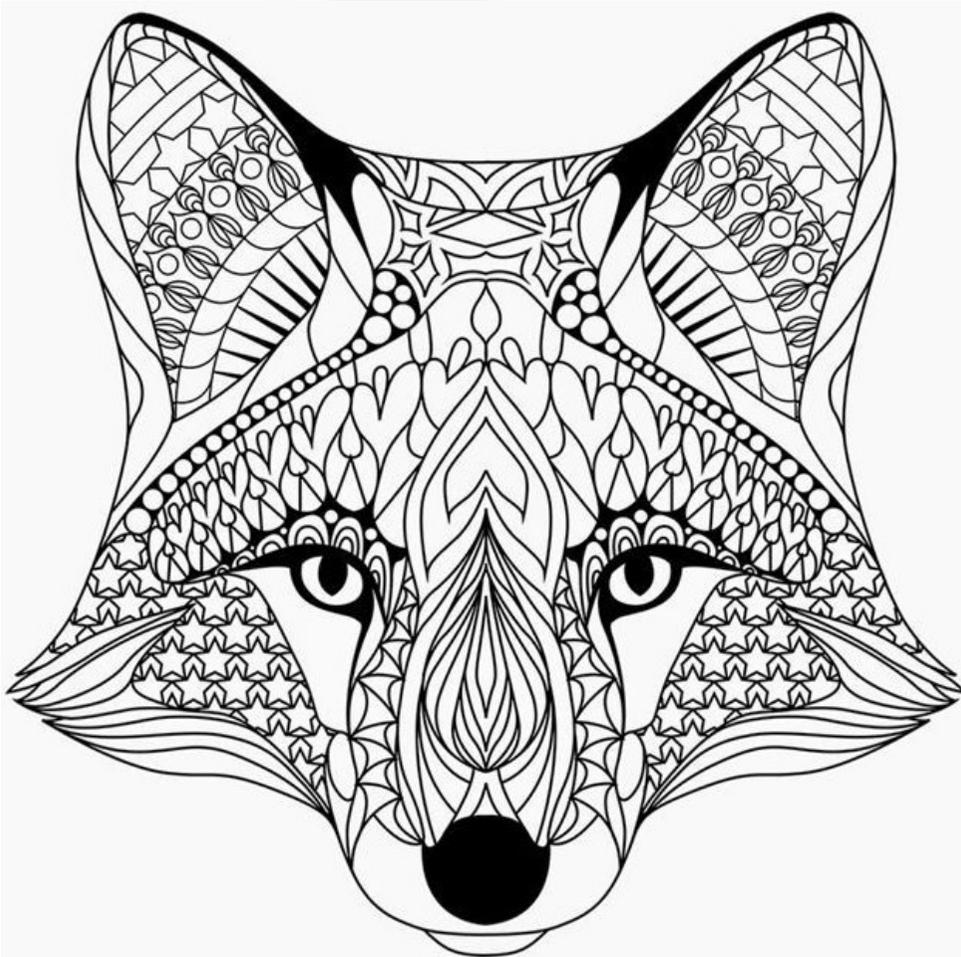
This booklet aims to provide you with information and advice to help you with your emotional and psychological recovery. No booklet will address all the needs of everyone, but it can provide a useful start.

We hope you find it helpful.



Mindful colouring

Colouring can give your mind a relaxing, present moment experience. It can also be a positive distraction from everything that is going on around you. Many people find it a beneficial tool in stressful situations. Here are some you can try.



People hospitalised with COVID-19 will have received different levels of treatment dependent on the severity of their symptoms.

Therefore, you may have received:

- Ward based oxygen therapy
- ICU based non-mechanical treatment to help your breathing (non-invasive ventilation)

or

- ICU based mechanical treatment to support your breathing (mechanical ventilation), alongside medication to help your body relax and cope with this (sedation).

Regardless of which type of treatment you received you are likely to have found yourself in a strange and unfamiliar environment, separated from friends and family, and feeling unsure or perhaps frightened about what will happen.

It is important to recognise that it takes time to recover from such unsettling experiences especially if, like many people, you are also troubled by:

- ♦ ongoing symptoms or treatment side effects e.g. breathlessness, fatigue, poor concentration, confusion
- ♦ your own or others' expectations of how you **'should'** feel now you are home
- ♦ unanswerable questions such as *"why did this happen to me?"* or *"why did I survive when others did not"*

What to expect

It is likely that many people returning home after treatment for COVID-19 will experience some ongoing symptoms, either from the disease itself or from the treatment they received.

These may include:

- Fatigue
- Breathlessness
- Difficulty sleeping
- Cognitive effects (i.e. memory, concentration, attention)
- Psychological effects (i.e. anxiety, low mood)

While this may concern you, it is important to remember that for most people these symptoms are temporary. If you become worried that things are not improving over time you should talk to your GP.

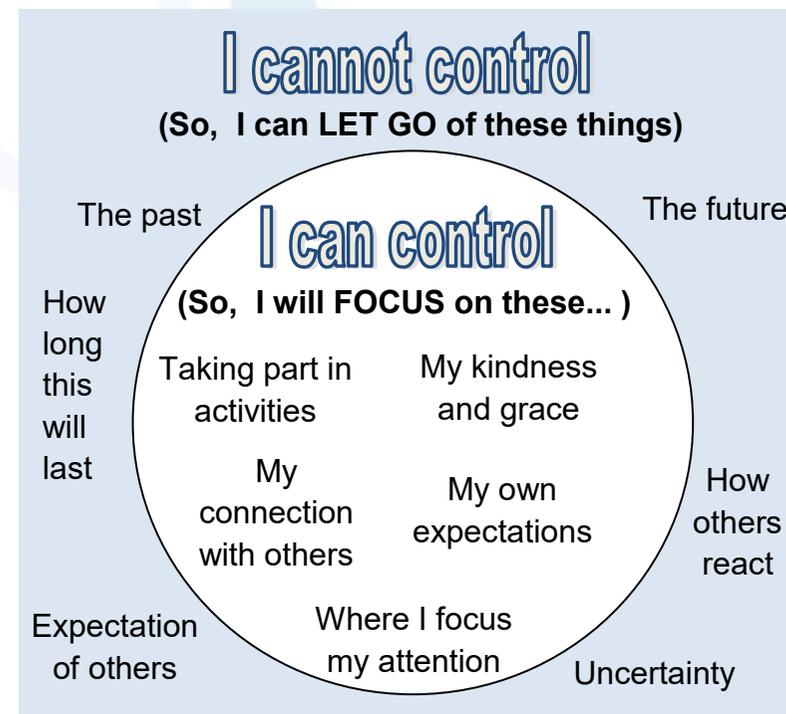
Fatigue

Fatigue is to be expected after being unwell, especially if you have received intensive treatment in hospital. It is important to give yourself time to recover.

What can you do?

- ⇒ try to return to some of your normal activities
- ⇒ avoid the temptation to '*do it all*' on good days and '*do nothing*' on bad days
- ⇒ pace yourself, take regular breaks and build up slowly
- ⇒ Be kind to yourself, do not expect too much too soon

Acceptance and Mindfulness



Mindfulness is the practice of bringing your awareness to the '**present moment**', on purpose and without judgement.

By learning to simply observe our thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations with a kind and gentle curiosity we can, with practice, begin to '*let go*' of difficulty.

Well known Apps for practicing Mindfulness include:



headspace

Teaches meditation and mindfulness in just a few minutes each day



Provides guided meditations, sleep stories, breathing programs and relaxing music

Relaxation and Visualisation

Imagining a '**safe place**' can help you find a sense of calm and safety within yourself.

- Find a quiet and comfortable place where you won't be disturbed.
- Close your eyes if you feel comfortable to do so and take a couple of minutes to focus on your breathing.
- Now imagine a place where you feel calm, peaceful and safe. It may be a place you've been to before, somewhere you've dreamed about going to, or just somewhere you create in your mind's eye.
- If you notice any negative links or images to this place, then discard that image and think of something else (avoid using your home (or bed) as your '**safe place**').
- Imagine looking around you in that place. What can you see? What do you notice?
- Go through your senses: Notice the **sounds** that are around you. Think about any **smells** you notice there. Then focus on what you can feel - the earth beneath you or whatever is supporting you in that place, the temperature, any movement of air, anything else you can **touch**. Notice the pleasant physical sensations in your body whilst you enjoy this '**safe place**'.
- Now whilst you are in your peaceful and safe place, you might choose to give it a name, this might be one word or a phrase you can use to bring that image back, anytime you wish to.

You can choose to linger there a while, just enjoying the peace and serenity. Leave whenever you want to, just by opening your eyes and bringing your awareness back to the '**here and now**'.

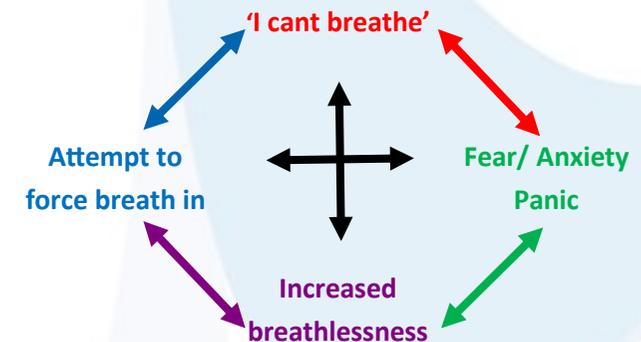
What to expect

Breathlessness

Breathlessness is the sensation of shortness of breath, it is a key symptom of COVID-19. Understandably, while your body recovers, it can take some time for your lungs to return to their full capacity. You may notice that this leaves you feeling breathless when completing tasks that you would normally manage easily.

Although shortness of breath can occur for many reasons, when it is linked to your health it can feel particularly frightening. This often leads to a vicious circle of increasing anxiety AND breathlessness (as this is also a symptom of anxiety), which can result in panic.

Shortness of breath



What can you do?

- ⇒ Instead of trying to force breath in, try to open up your shoulders and breathe out (i.e. sigh)
- ⇒ Try to slow down your breathing even though you feel you should speed it up (see page 5 **rectangular breathing**)

Rectangular Breathing

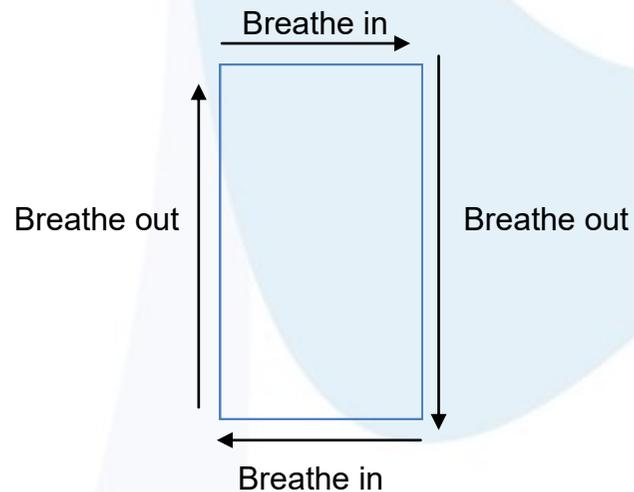
Rectangular breathing can help to ease breathlessness by reducing the sense of fear in your body.

What you need:

Any rectangular object in the room. A door is perfect!

What to do:

- ◆ Look up to the top left hand corner of the door
- ◆ Use your eyes to trace horizontally from the top left hand side of the door to the top right hand side of the door. Do this slowly and breathe in as you do so
- ◆ Now use your eyes to follow the longer length of the door from the top right corner of the door all the way down to the ground. Breathe out as you do this.



It should only take a few minutes to feel calmer.

Relaxation and Visualisation

The rectangular breathing exercise is not just for breathlessness. It can be helpful at any time to help you to feel more relaxed and calm.

You can enhance this technique by using colour breathing...

Imagine that as you inhale you are taking in the **calm blue air** and as you exhale, imagine you are breathing out all of the **red tension**. Imagining this colour change can deepen the relaxation and benefit of the breathing exercise.

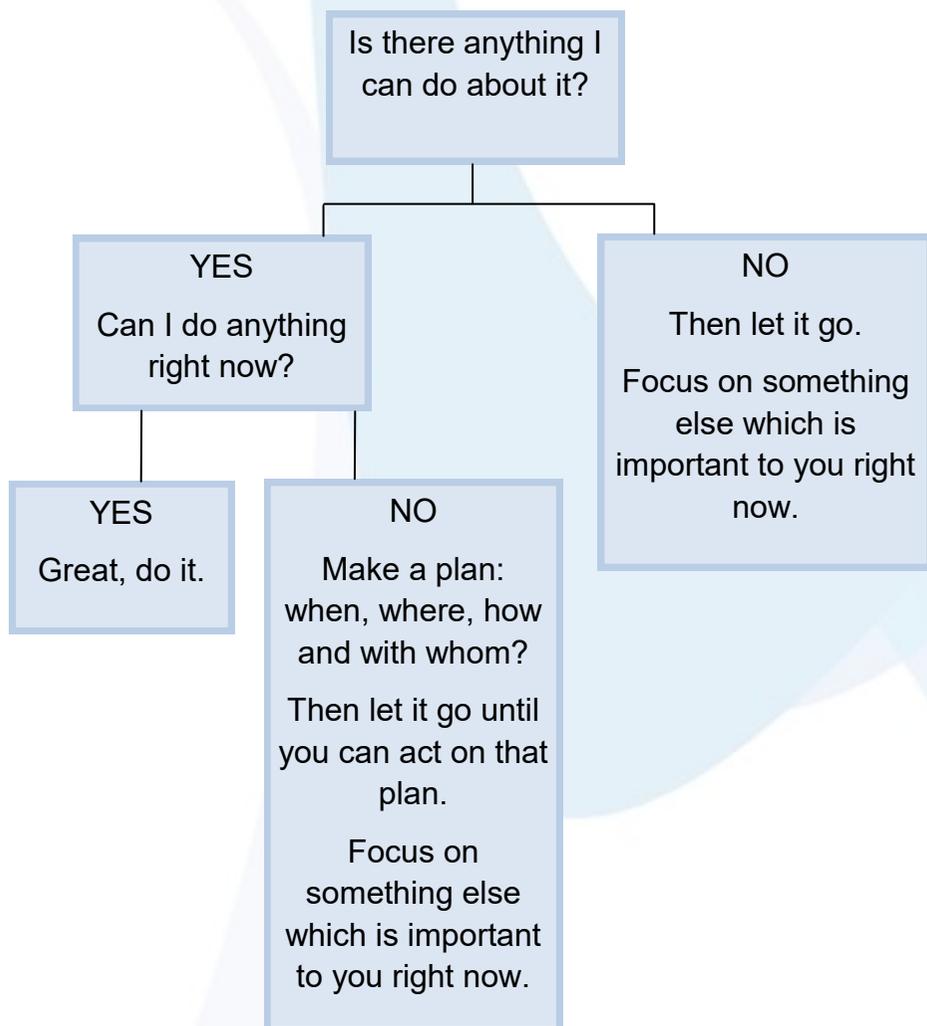
With any breathing exercise remember practice makes perfect!

Managing worries

If you find you are spending a lot of time worrying ...

Use the Worry Tree

What is my worry?...



What to expect

Difficulty sleeping

Busy environments, certain treatments, feeling unwell and stressed can all disrupt our normal sleeping patterns when in hospital. As a result you may notice that you have difficulty sleeping or feel that you are sleeping too much when you first return home.

What can you do?

- ⇒ Try to get back to your normal sleep routine as soon as possible
- ⇒ Avoid taking long naps during the day
- ⇒ Do things that help you relax before bed (i.e. listening to music, reading) and avoid things that keep you awake (i.e. caffeinated drinks, alcohol, screen time)
- ⇒ If worries are keeping you awake try writing them down. You can choose whether or not to come back to them in the morning.

Cognitive difficulties

If you received intensive care treatment for COVID -19 you may notice effects on your:

- Memory
- Concentration / Attention
- Speed of 'taking in' and understanding information

This can be a result of the medication you were given to help your body relax and this usually passes with time. It can also be related to ongoing emotional distress.

What can you do?

- ⇒ To help with memory try writing things down, use a diary/ calendar or even use your Alexa if you have one
- ⇒ To help with concentration and speed of understanding, try breaking tasks down, slow down, do one thing at a time etc.

Should I be feeling like this ?

Psychological effects

After leaving hospital following serious illness, there is often an expectation that you should *'feel happy'*

However, we know that after an unexpected / frightening health event it is common to experience a range of different emotions, both positive and negative, which may include:

- | | |
|----------------|--------------------------|
| ◇ Anxiety | ◇ Irritable |
| ◇ Disbelief | ◇ Reduced motivation |
| ◇ Sad/ tearful | ◇ Restless |
| ◇ Tired | ◇ Confusion |
| ◇ Low | ◇ Emotionally numb |
| ◇ Guilt | ◇ Relief (at recovering) |
| ◇ Confusion | ◇ Happy |
| ◇ Anger | ◇ Grateful |

Strong emotions are normal, even to be expected, and can *'come and go'* over time. This does not mean you are *'not coping'*. This is because your mind is trying to make sense of everything that has happened.

Not everyone will experience difficulty. Some patients report positive psychological effects, such as a sense of gratitude, a desire to help others or feeling like they an opportunity to change their life for the better. In short ...

There is no right or wrong way to feel!

Step out of your worries — STOPP

STOP! Just pause for a moment

TAKE A BREATH

OBSERVE

- What thoughts are going through your mind?
- Where is your focus of attention?
- What are you reacting to?

PULL BACK - PUT IN SOME PERSPECTIVE

Don't believe everything you think!

- Is this thought a fact or opinion?
- Is there another way of looking at this situation?
- What advice would I give a friend?
- What would a trusted friend say to me right now?

PRACTISE WHAT WORKS - PROCEED

- What is the best thing to do right now?
- What will be helpful for me to think and do?
- Where can I focus my attention right now?
- Do what will be effective and appropriate.

Be compassionate and kind to yourself.

This is a challenging environment and situation to be in.

Managing difficult thoughts and feelings

It is easy for our mind to get **stuck on a 'train of thought'**. This can be about the future (worry) or the past (dwelling) and often leads to feelings of anxiety / low mood.

If you notice you are on this 'train', this simple Grounding exercise can help you 'step off' . It uses the 4 senses to help you 'step-off' and focus back on the '**present moment**'.

5 ★ 4 ★ 3 ★ 2 ★ 1
SLOW DOWN & CALM DOWN
FIRST OFF - TAKE 3 SLOW & QUIET DEEP BREATHS!

5 List 5 things you can **SEE** 👁️👁️

4 List 4 things you can **FEEL** ✋

3 List 3 things you can **HEAR** 👂

2 List 2 things you can **SMELL** 👃

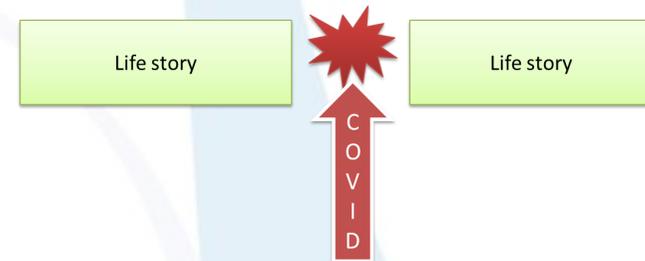
1 List something **positive** about yourself 😊

MAKE today COUNT

FINISHED? NOW - TAKE 3 MORE SLOW & QUIET DEEP BREATHS ☺

Should I be feeling like this?

Admission to hospital under unexpected / frightening circumstances can often be experienced as a significant traumatic event.



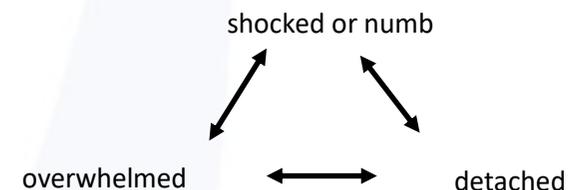
You may have felt fearful that you would not survive and / or you may have witnessed loss of life.

The human body naturally responds to such experiences by going into 'fight or flight' mode. This automatic response is our body's way of getting ready to either 'run away' or 'fight' the threat and leads to bodily symptoms such as:

- ◇ A faster heartbeat
- ◇ Fast, shallow breathing and/or breathlessness
- ◇ Nausea
- ◇ Numbness or shock
- ◇ Feelings of fear and anxiety

Even when a threatening experience has past, it can take some time for your mind and body to return to normal .

As it does this, you may notice that you move back and forth between feeling...



Should I be feeling like this?

Some people experience additional physical, emotional and behavioral changes, such as:

- flashbacks and / or nightmares to their time in hospital
- avoidance of places, people, objects and activities that remind them of what happened
- feelings of being 'on edge' - or constantly monitoring for signs of threat (i.e. new physical symptoms)
- not wanting to talk about what happened.
- not thinking about what happened **OR** thinking about it all the time - **going over and over it in your mind.**
- difficulty sleeping, concentrating /remembering things.

These symptoms are normal following a significant trauma and although disturbing, are nothing to worry about.

They are another sign that your mind is trying to process everything that has happened so that it can '*keep you safe*' in the future. For most people these symptoms will begin to improve during the first 4 weeks after leaving hospital.

Tolerating uncertainty

After experiencing an unexpected and frightening health event, life can seem less secure than before. You may feel that you have many unanswered question such as:

- **why did this happen to me?**
- **why did I survive when others didn't?**

Thinking about this can lead to uncomfortable feelings of uncertainty about your health / the future.

What can you do?

- Gradually getting back into your normal routine.
- If possible, try to talk about what happened with someone you trust, but remember to do this at your own pace.
- Allowing yourself to feel difficult emotions such as sad, upset, or fearful. These feelings are normal and natural.
- Writing down your thoughts and feelings can help you to process them, and come to terms with what has happened.
- Reminding yourself that you are safe and that the frightening event is in the past - be in the '**present moment**'
- Try to stay involved with things that you enjoy and are good at.
- Identify the things that have helped you to cope at difficult times in the past? Could they be helpful now?

Use this space to write down things you could try that you think may help: _____

The following pages also provide some exercises you may find helpful.