

Fact sheet

Coping in hospital

This fact sheet provides an overview of some of the common emotional difficulties people face during a hospital admission, as well as suggestions for how you might manage better during this time.

What you might expect

Being in hospital can be a difficult time because you are in an unfamiliar environment, away from your usual supports. Sometimes the very nature of your illness/injury, or the length of stay in hospital, can get you down. Having surgery, tests or procedures can lead you to feel worried or anxious.

Often we overlook the emotional side of being in hospital because we're so focussed on our physical recovery. But it is normal to feel distressed or overwhelmed, grumpy or miserable – being hospital comes with all sorts of emotions. So it is important to consider your emotional health as well as your physical health.

Common feelings patients experience in hospital

- > Health-related anxiety. This may be worry or anxiety over your condition and how you will recover, or worry about your future health.
- > Worry over the outcome of surgery or medical procedures.
- > Illness or injury related fears (e.g., developing a fear of needles).
- > Pain-related anxiety. This means concern and anxiety over how you will cope with pain, or how you will cope with painful procedures.
- > Feeling down or depressed.
- > Feeling frustrated and miserable due to a lengthy hospital admission, a lack of progress, or having to be dependent on others.
- > Sometimes pre-existing problems, such as depression or anxiety, become more overwhelming due to poor physical health.
- > Loneliness due to a lack of emotional and practical support.

- > Panic attacks - feeling an overwhelming sense of panic, sometimes coming on suddenly out of the blue.
- > Grief, which may be related to losses you have experienced as a result of your condition or due to bad news.
- > Sleep difficulties, including bad dreams and nightmares.
- > Problems with concentration and memory.
- > Feeling traumatised by procedures or the overall experience of being in hospital.
- > Feeling a lack of control and loss of independence.

Helpful tips for coping in hospital

- > Talk to people about how you feel (e.g., family, friends, and staff members).
- > Express your emotions rather than keeping them bottled up inside.
- > Try writing down your thoughts. Some people find this very helpful. Especially when they can't talk to others about how they feel right away. Sometimes thoughts we have don't seem as bad when we see them written down, and this can help to clarify our problems or issues.
- > Ask questions about your condition, upcoming procedures etc. We often deal better with problems when we have all the facts. No question is too silly to ask!
- > Consider some strategies that may help you relax. Relaxation techniques can be useful to help you sleep or calm down, especially before a procedure.
- > Set a goal for yourself every day. Even small goals can help you feel a sense of control.
- > Structure your days, where possible. Try planning a timetable for each day, together with hospital staff involved in your care, which includes some exercise (e.g. a short



walk, or stretches in bed), and some relaxation (e.g. time to rest or nap, or listening to music). Do things you enjoy – try to schedule at least one enjoyable activity each day.

- > Distract yourself at times. Taking your mind off things, even for a little while, can give you the emotional break you need.

Psychologists can speak to you about a range of strategies that have been shown to be helpful for patients in hospital. If you would like some help, please let us know about your experiences so we can work with you to help make your time in hospital a little easier!

24-hour crisis support is available from
Mental Health Triage 13 14 65

24-hour confidential telephone counselling
is available from Lifeline 13 11 14

For more information

**Psychology Consult Service
Royal Adelaide Hospital
Port Rd
Adelaide SA 5000
Telephone: 7074 2446**