



Coping with Stressful Events

A guide for patients and families in hospital



The Ottawa
Hospital

Disclaimer

This is general information developed by The Ottawa Hospital. It is not intended to replace the advice of a qualified health-care provider. Please consult your health-care provider who will be able to determine the appropriateness of the information for your specific situation.

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Introduction

The Ottawa Hospital's vision is to provide each patient patient with the world-class care, exceptional service and compassion we would want for a loved one. We are here to help you through this difficult event. Please read this guide and talk to your care team for more information.

About this guide

This guide is for patients and families who have experienced a stressful event. In it, you will find:

- A list of what feelings, thoughts and actions you might have in the first few hours or days
- Practical tips for how to cope with a stressful event
- A list of questions to ask your care team
- How to set up a "spokesperson"
- A list of community resources to help you
- When and how to contact the Department of Patient Relations

There is space in the back of this guide where you can write down:

- The names and contact information of your care team (page 6 and 7)
- The names and contact information of other important people (page 7)
- Questions you have for your care team (page 9 and 10)
- The answers your care team gives you (page 9 and 10)
- Next steps and test results (page 8)
- Any other notes (page 11 to 17)

What to expect in the first hours and days


You may feel overwhelmed, confused and stressed. You might feel like you don't know what to do, or that you are in a fog. These feelings are common when you or someone you care about is going through a stressful event.

Everyone reacts to these events in their own way. Two people who have experienced the same event may react very differently.

The effects of a stressful event can appear in your body (**physical symptoms**), in your mind (**cognitive symptoms**), in your feelings (**emotional symptoms**) and in your actions (**behavioural symptoms**).


Physical symptoms

- Chills
- Thirst
- Fatigue (tiredness)
- Trouble sleeping
- Sick to your stomach (nausea)
- No appetite
- Fainting
- Weakness
- Chest pain



Cognitive symptoms

- Confusion
- Forgetfulness
- Trouble making decisions
- Trouble concentrating
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Nightmares




Emotional symptoms

- Fear
- Guilt
- Shame
- Grief
- Anger
- Worry
- Disbelief
- Disconnection



Behavioural symptoms

- Needing more time alone
- Needing to be with other people
- Being impatient with people
- Having trouble relaxing
- Having less interest in eating
- Having less interest in taking care of yourself
- Having trouble managing nervous energy
- Talking more or talking less than usual
- Sleeping more or sleeping less than usual



Sometimes you will feel symptoms right after the stressful event. Sometimes you will feel them a few hours or a few days later. Sometimes you will feel them weeks or months after the event. These are called emotional aftershocks or stress reactions.

Tips for coping with a stressful event

- Pay more attention to your feelings and reactions. Knowing your feelings can help you address them.
- Try not to judge or blame yourself.
- Try to ask people for what you need. Be polite but firm.
- Talk about your feelings with a trusted person.
- Remember to drink and eat, even if it is something small.
- Try to do some physical movement each day.
- Do your best to rest and keep good sleep habits.
- Take a break, even if it's just a short walk or bathroom break.
- Reach out to your support network (friends, family, religious group, community etc.) for help.

******If you have a health problem that may be made worse by stress, make an appointment with your family doctor or nurse practitioner. Tell them what is happening in your life. ******

Tips for supporting someone during a stressful event

If a friend or loved one has just experienced a stressful event, it can be hard to know how to help them. Here are some ways you can help support them:

- Sometimes silence can be the best support. Just being present can offer comfort.
- Allow your loved one to feel their feelings. It is common to feel shock, guilt, anger and sadness. They may feel numb or in a fog.
- Encourage your loved one to have someone with them when they get medical updates and other important information. It can be hard to remember details when feeling stressed.
- Provide practical support. Help make sure your loved one eats healthy food and gets enough rest.
- Offer to manage requests from family or friends for an update. Offer to share information with others. Being a spokesperson for the family can be valuable support. (See page 5 about choosing a spokesperson.)

Asking questions

We don't expect you to know how things work at the hospital or why we do certain things. Please ask questions. Whether they are very simple or complex, there are things you need and want to know.

We will do our best to explain to you what we can. Don't be afraid to repeat your questions if you have forgotten the answer or need more explanation.

Sometimes you may think of questions when there is no one around to ask. There is space in this guide to write down your questions on pages 9 and 10.

Remember to write down the answers in the same section when you get them.

Here are some questions you may want to ask the care team:

- What is your role in my loved one's care?
- How long will this procedure or operation take?
- When can I expect the next update?
- What are the hospital's visiting hours? How many people can visit at once?
- Can you please repeat what you said?
- Will I have access to social work services when I am transferred out of this department?

Taking notes

People who have experienced a stressful event often find it hard to understand or remember details. This is especially true when you come to an unfamiliar place like a hospital.

Write down what you hear so you can refer to it later. Your notes can also help you share what you've heard with loved ones. There is space in this guide where you can write notes on pages 11 to 17.

Care providers

You or your loved one's care team may include doctors, nurses, social workers, home care providers and others. There is a space in this guide where you can write down each person's name, role and contact information on pages 6 and 7.

Test results and plans

A lot of different things can happen in a hospital, even during short stays. You can use this guide as a record of what happens. You can use page 8 of this guide to write down:

- Which tests are done
- Test results
- Next steps
- Information your care team tells you

Choosing a “spokesperson”

When someone has had a stressful event, it can sometimes be hard to manage all the texts, phone calls, and requests from family and friends for an update about them.

To help manage these requests, you may want to give one person in your group the job of “spokesperson.” When you receive news from the medical team, you relay that information to the spokesperson. The spokesperson then provides updates to family and friends on your behalf.

Please note that a “spokesperson” is not the same as a Substitute Decision Maker. Please talk to the social work department for more information about Substitute Decision Makers.

Going home

If you have questions about leaving the hospital (also known as being discharged), please ask a member of your health-care team.

Community resources

Community Information Centre of Ottawa	211
City of Ottawa	311
Crisis Line	1-866-996-0991
Telehealth	1-866-797-0000
Ottawa Victim Services	613-238-2762
Local Health Integration Network (LHIN)	613-310-2222





Patient Relations





The Department of Patient Relations receives, investigates and follows up on concerns and compliments that patients and their families may have about their care.





If you have questions or concerns about the care you or your family member is receiving, your health-care team needs to know. We recommend that you discuss your questions or concerns first with a member of your health-care team, your nurse, your treating doctor or the clinical manager.





After speaking to the staff involved in your care and to the manager, if you feel your questions or concerns need further attention, please contact the Patient Relations Department at 613-798-5555 ext. 13377 or prelations@toh.ca


The care team

 Care Team Member	_____	Name
	 _____	Role / title
	 _____	Contact method
	 _____	Contact information

 Care Team Member	_____	Name
	 _____	Role / title
	 _____	Contact method
	 _____	Contact information


 Care Team Member	_____	Name
	 _____	Role / title
	 _____	Contact method
	 _____	Contact information


 Care Team Member	_____	Name
	 _____	Role / title
	 _____	Contact method
	 _____	Contact information





Care Team Member

Name _____

 Role / title _____


 Contact method _____


 Contact information _____




Care Team Member


Name _____

 Role / title _____

 Contact method _____


 Contact information _____


Other important people





Other Important People

Name _____

 Role / title _____


 Organization _____


 Contact information _____





Other Important People

Name _____

 Role / title _____


 Organization _____


 Contact information _____





Other Important People

Name _____

 Role / title _____


 Organization _____


 Contact information _____




Other Important People

Name _____

 Role / title _____

 Organization _____

 Contact information _____

Test results and next steps

Date	Test / next steps	Results / information

Questions

Question:

Answer:

Answered by:

Date:

Question:

Answer:

Answered by:

Date:

Question:

Answer:

Answered by:

Date:

Question:

Answer:

Answered by:

Date:

Question:

Answer:

Answered by:

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Question:

Answer:

Answered by:

Date:

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