Coping with Prolonged Rest in Bed
A guide for patients

When you are faced with the prospect of prolonged rest in bed, it is a natural response to feel fearful, uncertain, sad, or angry. You may feel annoyed because you think that you’re not working towards your rehabilitation, or you may feel helpless, and not able to see how you are going to manage the coming weeks. Feelings of boredom and exasperation are also common. Once in the midst of prolonged bed rest, you may find that at times these feelings become stronger, but that at other times these feelings are less strong, and prolonged bed rest feels more bearable. You may also find that whilst resting in bed, your mind races with different thoughts which are sometimes unpleasant and create feelings of anxiety.

The objective of this booklet is to offer suggestions for managing these emotions that may arise during prolonged rest in bed to help you better manage this time. The information in this booklet is also intended for your family and friends to help them understand what you’re going through, and to support you during this time.
Sometimes we all find ourselves in situations that we cannot change, no matter how much we would like things to be different. This is where coping strategies come in. Coping strategies help us to learn to accept situations that are beyond our control and also to find ways to help us feel better in spite of the fact that the problem still exists.

We all use different coping strategies at different points in our lives. Whether we talk with friends or family, problem solve, have a drink, or distract ourselves with pleasant activities, all of these strategies are used with the intention to help us cope with a situation.

Importantly, there is no one “prescription” for getting through prolonged bed rest. It is a process of figuring out what works best for you at this time. The rest of this booklet will discuss different coping strategies that you can use to help you make the coming weeks more manageable. This booklet discusses helpful coping strategies for prolonged bed rest. If you would like more information on coping with your Spinal Cord Injury in general, please ask to receive information on ‘Coping with Spinal Cord Injury’.

Practical ideas

There are several practical and relatively easy strategies that may make your time resting in bed easier to manage.

- Family or friends can bring in activities such as board games, sudoku books, crossword puzzles, magazines and books.
- A small portable DVD player or other small electronic devices with earphones to listen to music can be brought in.
- You are welcome to bring in a laptop or use the Patient Information System (PES).
- Prism glasses may be available on loan to help you read and view your laptop/DVD player whilst lying down.

Note: Personal items are brought into the hospital at your own risk.

Using the above strategies to interact with your environment and keep yourself busy will help by breaking up your day into smaller chunks of time that are more manageable. By doing this, it’s likely that feelings such as boredom, or exasperation will diminish too.
Other ways of coping

Clinical psychologists are specialists who are trained in strategies that may help you better manage the required bed rest. They are able to help you with the following:

Relaxation

Planned relaxation can help reduce unpleasant feelings like stress, anxiety, and irritability and it can also help calm one's mind and body. Achieving a sense of deep relaxation decreases blood pressure, heart rate, muscle tension, and rate of breathing, as well as increasing feelings of being calm and in control. Research also suggests that relaxation can help to decrease one's perception of pain and also help overcome sleep difficulties. In these ways, planned relaxation helps to promote an overall sense of well-being.

This deep sense of relaxation can be learned through different relaxation techniques. Different people find that they prefer different types of relaxation. If you would like to practice relaxation, ask to speak with the clinical psychologist. They can help you learn the relaxation strategies best suited for you by practicing them with you. Some relaxation techniques that may be helpful include:

(1) Guided Imagery / Visualisation

This involves imagining yourself relaxing in a beautiful, peaceful scene, say on an idyllic beach, or a mountain top. The idea is to use all the senses: imagining not just the sights, but the smells, feel and sounds of a place. In this technique, you form mental images to take a visual journey to a peaceful, calming place or situation and in this way a state of deep relaxation can occur.

(2) Autogenic Relaxation

This technique uses both visual imagery and body awareness to move you into a deep state of relaxation. You imagine a peaceful place, and then focus on different physical sensations. For example, one might focus on breathing, or a calm heartbeat.

(3) Breathing techniques

This can help to move the body into a state of relaxation as well. Most techniques involve abdominal breathing, where your abdomen rises as you breathe in, and this helps to draw air into the bottom of the lungs. It's a very efficient form of breathing which slows down the breathing rate, and brings about a feeling of calm.

Mindfulness

Learning to be present in the here and now without rushing to our uncertain future, or thinking of the past, is a very effective way of dealing with life, and particularly your time resting in bed.

Mindfulness has been described as a process of bringing a certain quality of attention to moment-by-moment experience. It is frequently used to refer to a way of paying attention that is sensitive and accepting. It is the ability of the mind to observe without criticism. With this ability, people are aware of things without condemnation or judgment, simply taking a balanced interest in things exactly as they are. Learning to just be and accept your state of resting in bed will help you manage this time.
Mindfulness meditation helps and trains our mind from getting distracted by outside disturbances, and enables us to focus our thoughts and in this way relaxes the mind. Ask to speak to a clinical psychologist if you would like to learn mindfulness meditation.

Managing frustration and anger

We all know what anger is, and we’ve all felt it: whether as a fleeting annoyance or as full-fledged rage. Sometimes it’s our immediate surroundings that give us cause for irritation and fury. Sometimes problems or situations can weigh on us and make us feel angry or trapped. Memories of traumatic events can also trigger angry feelings.

Sometimes however, our anger and frustration are caused by very real and inescapable difficulties in our lives. Not all anger is misplaced, and often it’s a healthy, natural response to these difficulties. However, when anger gets out of control, and turns destructive, it can lead to problems in your relationships and other areas. It can make you feel as though you’re at the mercy of an unpredictable and powerful emotion.

Anger management is about understanding your anger and why it happens. It is about learning and practicing better ways of expressing anger, and sometimes knowing how to prevent it from occurring in the first place. Specifically, anger management is about knowing the triggers and early warning signs of anger, and learning techniques to calm down and manage the situation before it gets out of control.

Detailed below are several strategies that you can use to help manage your angry feelings. A clinical psychologist is available to help you to learn any of these strategies if you so wish.

(1) Relaxation strategies

Relaxation tools, as discussed previously in this booklet, can help calm down angry feelings. If you are interested in learning relaxation strategies, ask to speak with a clinical psychologist.

(2) Cognitive restructuring

When you’re angry your thinking can get very exaggerated and dramatic. Try replacing these kinds of thoughts with more useful, rational ones, and you should find that this has an effect on the way you feel. For example, when thinking about your prolonged bed rest, instead of telling yourself ‘I can’t stand it’, or ‘it’s awful’, or ‘I won’t get through this’, tell yourself ‘It’s frustrating, and it’s understandable that I’m upset about it, but getting angry is not going to fix it’. Psychologists call this type of thinking ‘self talk’.

(3) Acceptance strategies

ACT or Acceptance Commitment Therapy helps you learn to experience anger without feeling the need to act on it. So rather than replacing the angry thoughts or pushing them down, it’s about learning to notice them without getting caught up in them. Learning to become a gentle observer of the thoughts – in other words – learning you are separate to the thoughts, and that your anger will come and go, like waves on an ocean. This involves learning to A) accept and acknowledge the angry thoughts and therefore end the struggle with them, B) choose a direction for your energies – what do you really identify with? – choosing to act on life not on the anger, C) taking steps to take charge of what you can control and change what you can change. Mindfulness meditation can
help in the development of mindful acceptance. If you would like to learn more about ACT talk to your clinical psychologist.

(4) Assertiveness skills

Assertiveness skills ensure that anger is channelled and expressed in clear and respectful ways. Being assertive means being clear with others about what your needs and wants are, feeling okay about asking for them, and respecting the other person’s needs and concerns. Being prepared to negotiate may help you achieve a satisfactory outcome, and diffuse your feelings of anger. Avoid using words like ‘never’ or ‘always’; for example, “I’m always washed last!!”. These statements make you feel angry and don’t leave much possibility for the problem to be solved. Instead; “Can I talk to you about getting washed in the morning?” which can lead to a positive dialogue and outcome, making you feel more at ease and in control.

Contacting a clinical psychologist

Throughout this document we have identified situations where you may wish to talk to a clinical psychologist. Assistance from clinical psychologists is an integral part of the rehabilitation service provided at State Rehabilitation Service. Ask your nurse or any of the medical team to put you in contact with the clinical psychologist, they can talk to you wherever you feel most comfortable.