The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

The Road to Recovery in Russian

The Word's Worth

Michele A. Berdy's The Word's Worth

August 13, 2021



Alena Darmel / pexels

Встать на ноги: get back on your feet

It's Friday in Week 1427 of the coronavirus pandemic — or at least that's the way it seems, doesn't it? At this point most of my friends and acquaintances have had it, and thankfully almost all have survived. One friend was just released from the hospital, so it seems like a good time to remember some of the ways people get over trauma and illness in Russian. Since Covid isn't going anywhere, these words will surely come in handy for a while.

What you hope to be able to say is one of the verbs that begins with the prefix вы- which has the sense of doing something to completion, like getting completely healthy. So выздороветь is to fully recover. Sometimes people aren't sure if they've had Covid, but they got better from something: Вроде болел, а теперь выздоровел (I was sick with something, I think, but I'm all better now). But in other cases and times, they know what they had: Началась эпидемия

сыпного тифа, мы с женой одновременно заболели. Я выздоровел, она умерла (When there was an outbreak of typhus, my wife and I got sick at the same time. I got over it, but she died).

You can also use the verb вылечиться, which has the sense of being cured from something, not just recovering from it on your own. This is an appropriate verb to use when describing getting over Covid: Слышал, что радикально вылечиться можно только с помощью вакцинации (I heard the getting completely cured is only possible if you get vaccinated).

The third вы- verb is выкарабкаться, which has the literal meaning of to scramble or dig yourself out of a hole and the figurative meaning of fighting your way out of something. You might battle your way out of depression: Надо помочь выкарабкаться из депрессии (You have to help someone pull themselves out of a depression). Or out of a serious illness or accident: Ему было далеко за пятьдесят, но он выкарабкался после операции (He was on the far side of 50, but he fought his way back to health after the operation).

Perhaps the most common verb for getting better is поправиться, but it's a slightly tricky verb. Here if you don't know the context, you can get very confused. If you ask, Как Ваня? (How's Vanya?) and hear in response Поправился!, that could mean "He's put on some weight" or "He's gotten over his illness." In the old days, it probably always meant both, since being thin was once a sign of illness and poverty, not wealth and a wellness routine.

Поправиться is also what you say when correcting a misstatement: "Я часто пишу домой, то есть не очень часто" — он поправился ("I write home a lot, well actually — not much," he clarified).

For our purposes, it's also one of the common ways to describe someone on the mend: Он провёл в лечебнице четыре месяца, поправился и вышел (He spent four months in the clinic, then he recovered and was released).

You can also use the phrase идти на поправку (on his/her way to recovery) when someone is definitely improving but is not yet well. Моя мама идёт на поправку (My mother is on the way to recovery).

There is another verb that differs from поправиться by one letter: оправиться. If you look at the dictionary meanings of the two words, they are almost the same. Looking back in time that seems to be true, but my informal focus group says that in terms of health, поправиться is used more commonly for getting better than оправиться, but when оправиться is used, it means being fully recovered. Как только мальчик оправился от этой не слишком тяжёлой болезни, он заразился чёрной оспой (As soon as the boy fully recovered from an illness that wasn't too severe, he caught hemorrhagic smallpox).

Оправиться is often used in the sense of recovering emotionally or psychologically from a disaster or misfortune. Sometimes it's impossible to accept a tragedy: После революции Фаберже потерял фабрики, бежал из страны, так и не оправился от потрясения и часто повторял: "Жизни больше нет" (After the Revolution Faberge lost his factories and fled the country; he never quite recovered from the trauma and often said, "Life is over").

A very common meaning of оправиться is to pull yourself together – straighten your hair

and clothing, make yourself presentable: В класс вошёл ректор. Все встали и быстро оправились (The rector entered the classroom, and everyone stood and quickly made themselves presentable).

A very useful word for recovery of all sorts is оклематься. Of unknown origin, the word has the broad sense of improving, getting back to normal. It can mean to recover from an illness: Мой муж оклемался от коронавируса месяца через два (It took my husband about two months to get over coronavirus). Or it can mean to get over some emotional pain: Она разбила мне сердце, и я до сих пор не смог оклематься (She broke my heart, and I haven't gotten over it). Or it can mean to get back to feeling normal after, say, a trip or change of lifestyle. После такой тяжёлой поездки нужно время, чтобы оклематься (After such a hard trip you need time to feel like yourself again).

Or you could say you got back on your feet in Russian: подниматься (or sometimes встать) на ноги. Sometimes it's literal: В больнице вам помогут быстро встать на ноги после перенесённой болезни (At the hospital they'll help you get back on your feet after your illness). Or sometimes it's figurative, often in the sense of being independent, establishing yourself: Чтобы малый бизнес прочно встал на ноги, какое-то время его нужно поддержать (For small business to get firmly established, for a while we need to provide support).

As far as health goes, what you really want to hear is the lovely old phrase как рукой сняло. It literally means "like it was taken away by a hand" but its meaning is almost "like it was never there": После этого лекарства боль как рукой сняло (After I took that medicine, the pain disappeared like magic).

In week 1427 of the pandemic, we need some magic.

Original url: https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2021/08/13/the-road-to-recovery-in-russian-a74776