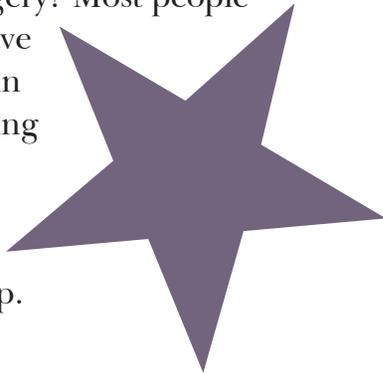


AgePage

Hospital Hints

Has your doctor said you need medical tests done in the hospital? Are you having surgery? Most people worry when they have to spend the night in the hospital. Learning more about what to expect and about people who work in hospitals can help.



What to Bring

It's best to bring as little as you can to the hospital. You will need:

- ◆ Bathrobe and slippers (put your name on each item); most hospitals provide special bed clothes
- ◆ Comfortable clothes to wear home (they may be the clothes you wore to the hospital)
- ◆ Toothbrush, toothpaste, shampoo, comb and brush, deodorant, and your own razor

- ◆ Your hearing aids, dentures, and glasses
- ◆ A little cash (not more than \$10) and a credit card that a family member or friend can keep for you
- ◆ Books or magazines

Make sure you bring your health insurance card. If you don't have health insurance, talk with the admissions staff about other payment methods and sources of financial aid. Remember to bring photo identification and updated information about:

- ◆ Past illnesses and surgeries
- ◆ Your medicines, including prescription and over-the-counter drugs
- ◆ Your allergies
- ◆ Names and telephone numbers (home and business) to contact in an emergency

What to Leave at Home

Leave jewelry (including wedding rings, earrings, and watches), extra cash, additional credit cards, and your checkbook at home. Don't bring electric shavers, hair dryers, curling irons, or similar equipment. Also, leave your electronics at home. The hospital is not responsible for your cell phone, laptop, tablet, CD player, or other electronics.

Admission

Once your hospital stay is planned, many hospitals have a staff member call to ask pre-admissions questions over the phone. Then, when you go to the hospital, many of the forms are already filled out and ready for you to sign.

Your first stop at the hospital is the admitting office. You will sign forms that:

- ◆ Give the hospital details about yourself, your doctor, and your insurance
- ◆ Explain your surgery, test, or procedure
- ◆ Give your okay for the medical staff to treat you

Also, you will be asked about advance directives (see Patient Rights on page 8).

After the paperwork is completed, a hospital bracelet will be put on your wrist by the admissions staff and checked by nurses. Read your bracelet to make sure the information is correct.

Hospital Staff

While you are in the hospital, many people might take care of you.

- ◆ **Doctors** are in charge of your overall care. The doctor in charge may be your primary doctor (the doctor you

see outside the hospital), a specialist on the hospital staff, or a hospitalist who is trained to oversee your care while you are in the hospital.

- ◆ **Nurses** have a variety of jobs. For example, registered nurses can give medicines, licensed practical nurses can help feed you, and nurses' aides can help with personal care.
- ◆ **Respiratory therapists** prevent and treat breathing problems. They teach exercises that help avoid lung infections after surgery or extended bed rest.
- ◆ **Technicians** can take blood or perform tests such as x-rays.
- ◆ **Physical therapists** show you how to strengthen muscle and other tissues, increase flexibility, and improve coordination.
- ◆ **Occupational therapists** work with you to restore, maintain, or improve your ability to perform everyday tasks like cooking, eating, bathing, or dressing.
- ◆ **Dietitians** can plan menus, including special meals, and teach you how to have well-balanced meals at home.
- ◆ **Clinical pharmacists** may be consulted about the medicines you take.

- ◆ **Social workers** assist you and your family. They can help find homecare, rehabilitation, social services, long-term care, and support groups.

Inside the Hospital

Hospitals have many patient-care areas. For example, the intensive care unit (also called the ICU) has special equipment and staff to care for very ill patients. Coronary care units (CCUs) give intensive medical care to patients with heart disease. In both the ICU and CCU, visiting hours are very limited. Often only family members are allowed to see patients. Surgery is done in the operating room (OR). After an operation, patients are cared for in the recovery room until they are ready to move to their hospital rooms.



Hospital Safety Tips

Because you may feel weak or tired, here are some safety tips to follow:

- ◆ If you are told to stay in bed, use the call bell or button when you need help.

- ◆ Use the controls to lower your bed before getting in or out.
- ◆ Sit on the edge of the bed for a minute or so before standing.
- ◆ Watch out for the wires and tubes that may be around your bed.
- ◆ Try to keep the things you need within easy reach.
- ◆ Only take medicines given to you by nurses. Don't take medicine you brought from home without your doctor's permission.
- ◆ Hold on to grab bars for support when getting in and out of the bathtub or shower and when using the toilet.

After You Leave the Hospital

Older people may have health problems that make it hard for them to live on their own after they leave the hospital. In some hospitals and rehabilitation facilities, a team that includes a doctor, nurse, and social worker takes care of the special needs of older patients. This team also may include other specialists and therapists.

The team performs a careful exam, called a geriatric assessment, to learn about the patient's physical and mental health, family life, income, living arrangements, access to community

services, and ability to perform daily tasks. The team checks for health problems and makes a plan to help older patients get the health care and social services they need after they go home.

For Family and Caregivers

A hospital stay can be very hard for older people. Often, the strange routine and lack of sleep can cause confusion. Family and caregivers may be the first to notice these changes. Families should talk to a doctor if they see the patient is confused.

Ask Questions

During your hospital stay, you may have questions about what's happening. Keep a pad and pen by your hospital bed to write down questions you want to ask your doctor or nurse. For example:

- ◆ What will this test tell me? Why is it needed, and when will I know the results?
- ◆ What treatment is needed, and how long will it last?
- ◆ What are the benefits and risks of treatment?
- ◆ When can I go home?
- ◆ When I go home, will I have to change my regular activities or my diet?

- ◆ How often will I need checkups?
- ◆ Is any other follow-up needed?
- ◆ Who should I call if I have other questions?

Patient Rights

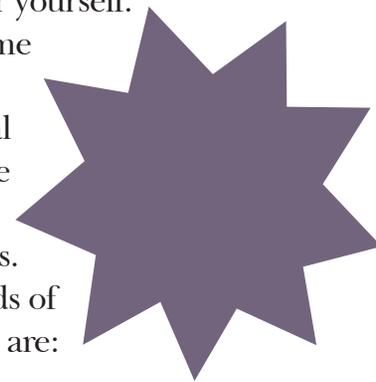
The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, often called the HIPAA Privacy Rule, protects your personal health information. If you want to give a family member access to your health and treatment information, you must first give your doctor written permission.

Before you go to the hospital, you might want to think about writing an advance directive. An advance directive says what medical treatment you want if you can't speak for yourself.

It also lets you name who you want to make your medical decisions if you are not able to make your own decisions.

Two common kinds of advance directives are:

- ◆ Living will
- ◆ Durable power of attorney for health care



In an Emergency

In a medical emergency, every second counts! You may have severe pain, a high temperature, or signs of infection, breathing problems, a bad injury, or sudden serious illness. In such a life-threatening emergency, seek medical help right away by calling 911. Be sure to tell the operator your problem and the address you're calling from.

You should always carry the following information:

- ◆ Doctor's name and phone number
- ◆ Family members' names and phone numbers
- ◆ Ongoing health problems
- ◆ Medicines you take, including prescription and over-the-counter drugs
- ◆ Medicines or other substances you are allergic to
- ◆ Health insurance information and policy numbers

If you have a medical problem such as epilepsy or diabetes, you should wear an ID bracelet or carry an ID card to let rescue workers and hospital staff know about these conditions.

In a living will, you list the kind of medical care you want (or don't want); it's called a living will because it takes effect while you are still alive.

In a durable power of attorney for health care, you name someone else (a family member or friend, for example) to make your medical decisions if you are unable to make them for yourself. You also can list any treatment you don't want.

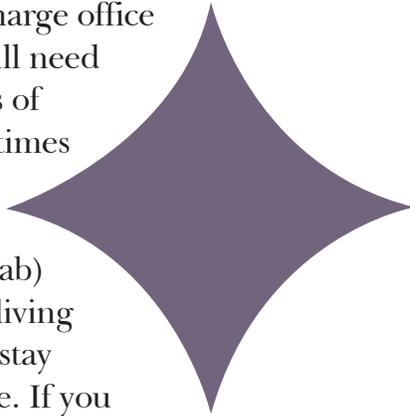
If you have an advance directive, bring a copy of it with you to the

hospital. Make sure your doctor has a copy, and check to make sure your wishes are part of your medical records. If you have a durable power of attorney for health care, be sure to give a copy to the person you've chosen to act on your behalf.

Going Home

When you are ready to go home, you'll get discharge plans from the medical team and a release form from the hospital business office.

Talk with the discharge office if you think you will need help with activities of daily living. Sometimes people go from the hospital to a rehabilitation (rehab) center or assisted living facility for a short stay before going home. If you need physical or occupational therapy, the hospital social worker can help arrange admission to a rehab center or make plans for you to be an outpatient at a facility.



For More Information

Here are some helpful resources:

American Hospital Association

155 North Wacker Drive
Chicago, IL 60606
1-800-424-4301 (toll-free)
www.aha.org

Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services

7500 Security Boulevard
Baltimore, MD 21244
1-800-633-4227 (toll-free)
1-877-486-2048 (TTY/toll-free)
www.medicare.gov

For more information on health and aging, including nutrition, nursing homes, having surgery, and getting your affairs in order, contact:

National Institute on Aging Information Center

P.O. Box 8057
Gaithersburg, MD 20898-8057
1-800-222-2225 (toll-free)
1-800-222-4225 (TTY/toll-free)
www.nia.nih.gov
www.nia.nih.gov/espanol

To sign up for regular email alerts, go to www.nia.nih.gov/health.

Visit www.nihseniorhealth.gov, a senior-friendly website from the National Institute on Aging and the National Library of Medicine. This website has health and wellness information for older adults. Special features make it simple to use. For example, you can click on a button to make the type larger.



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