



Full Version 7. Prepare for Your Stay in Hospital

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You, as a patient, need to know how to best prepare for your hospital stay. Ask questions, take notes and be involved.

Before admission to hospital

Speak openly with your doctor before going into a hospital. Sample questions include:

- Why do I need this treatment?
- What can I expect from this treatment or surgery?
- What are the risks, side effects and benefits of the treatment?
- What other options do I have?
- What can I do to help myself?
- When can I return to my regular activities?

The hospital setting

If you need care in a hospital, many different healthcare staff and likely more than one doctor will look you after. You will see:

- Unfamiliar rooms, unknown people and complex equipment
- Staff in different clothes from uniforms to street clothing helping with your care
- Patients who are ill
- Staff using new medical words that you may not know

As a result, you might not feel comfortable:

- Asking questions or talking about your fears
- Asking for help when staff are so busy
- Speaking up for yourself in case it changes how you will be treated
- Expressing feelings of stress, anger or depression

These thoughts and feelings are normal for people while in the hospital. Please talk about them with your healthcare team, patient advocate or a family member. Hospital staff would like to hear from you so they can give you the best possible care.

During your stay in hospital

- Share your healthcare needs and what you expect as a patient with hospital staff.
 - Share facts about your health and medical history.
 - Be involved in your healthcare. Remember: *Nothing about me, without me.*
 - Speak up if you have questions or concerns.
 - Ask your patient advocate or family member to speak for you. See *Choose a Patient Advocate.*
 - Bring non-slip footwear and a cane/walker if you use one at home.

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- Understand all care orders from hospital staff.
 - Ask staff to explain the care orders if they are not clear.
 - Repeat back what you heard, to be sure you know what to do.
 - If you are not sure, you could say:
 - “This is new to me. Could you explain this one more time?”
 - “This is new for me. Will you tell me if I have this right?”
 - Then restate the facts in your own words.
- Ask about all medications you are given.
 - Ask staff to check your wristband identification before giving you any medicines.
 - Carry your up-to-date *It’s Safe to Ask Medication Card*.
 - Check to see that you are given:
 - the right medication
 - in the right amount
 - the right route (pill, needle)
 - at the right time of day
 - Ask if this is the medication your doctor prescribed and why you are to take it.
 - Tell someone right away if you notice side effects.
 - Tell staff about any food or medicine allergies.
 - Tell staff about any vitamins or herbs you are taking.
- Tell hospital staff if and where you are feeling pain.
 - Pain relief medication can be given but the strength and dose may need adjusting.
 - Anti-nausea medication can be given to stop vomiting.
 - Tell a provider if you notice fever, redness or swelling after surgery.
- Keep track of details during your hospital stay. Write down information or ask your patient advocate or a family member to do it for you. Examples:
 - Names of doctors/specialists you speak with, dates of visits and contact information
 - Facts about follow-up steps, tests and care orders you are given
 - Where and when the tests occurred
 - When you can expect your test results
 - A list of all medications you are given, how much, the reason for taking them and any side effects. See *Work with Your Pharmacist - Medication Safety*.
- Help prevent infections.
 - Use soap and water, a packaged wipe, or hand sanitizer to stop the spread of germs.
 - Ask your visitors and the staff to wash their hands before they touch you.
 - Speak up if someone is working with you and they have not washed their hands.
Go to <http://ipac-canada.org/>
 - Don’t wear jewelry, such as rings that trap germs.

- Don't touch any IV or surgical sites.
- Tell the nurse if your dressing, catheter or drainage tube is loose.
- Ask visitors to stay away if they have a cold or feel ill.
- Ask family and friends to visit at different times to allow you to rest.
- Prevent falls.
 - Let others know if you feel dizzy or have fallen in the past.
 - Be sure your bed is low enough so your feet can touch the floor.
 - Ask for help getting in and out of the hospital bed.
 - Use the side rails on your hospital bed.
 - Wear non-slip footwear and use your cane/walker if you use one at home.
 - Ask for help if you need it.
 - Use handrails and grab bars provided in washrooms.
 - Be careful around hospital equipment and furniture.
 - Tell staff if you see a possible risk in the hospital room.

Before you leave the hospital

- Ask for the written orders about your care at home (discharge orders).
- Tell staff if you may require home care services. It may take up to one week to set up supports at home for you.
- Ask staff to review the discharge orders with you.
- Take notes or ask your patient advocate or family member to do this for you.
- Repeat back any instructions to be sure you know what to do.
- Know whom to call if you have a concern.

The discharge summary

When you leave the hospital, the attending doctor writes a discharge summary. It is sent to your family doctor. It is written in medical terms. It is placed in your hospital medical records. It may not be fully completed when you are discharged.

Depending on why you were in the hospital, you may need to ask certain questions about how to care for your health needs at home.

Examples of questions to ask might include:

- When do I need to follow up with my doctor?
- How soon will I feel better after leaving the hospital?
- Can I walk, climb stairs, go to the bathroom, prepare meals and drive?
- Should I take a shower instead of a bath at home?
- Should someone be with me at home?
- What side effects do I watch for? If I have any, what do I do?

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- Will I need any special equipment at home? Where do I get this equipment?
- Will I need physical therapy?
- Are there special exercises I should be doing?
- If I have wounds or dressings, how do I take care of them?
- Will I need any follow-up tests?
- When can I go back to work?
- Whom do I call if I have problems at home? What is this person's contact information?
- What medications do I take at home? Do I continue taking the medicines I was taking before coming to hospital?
- Are there medicines, vitamins or herbs I should not take?
- What are the possible side effects of the medicines?
- What do I do if I have any side effects?

Resources

Canadian Resources

- Manitoba Institute for Patient Safety (MIPS) websites: www.safetoask.ca and www.mips.ca.
- *Nothing About Me, Without Me! A Practical Guide for Avoiding Medical Errors*. Melinda Ashton and Linda Richards. Victoria, BC: Trafford Publishing; 2003.

Websites

- Consumers Advancing Patient Safety (CAPS) (United States). www.patientsafety.org/
- Institute for Patient- and Family-Centered Care (United States). www.ipfcc.org
- National Alliance for Caregiving (United States). www.caregiving.org

Books and Brochures

- *Engaging Patients as Safety Partners*. Patrice L. Spath (Editor). Chicago; Health Forum Inc.; 2008.
- *Partnering with Patients to Reduce Medical Errors*. Patrice L. Spath (Editor). Chicago: Health Forum; 2004.
- *Protect Yourself in the Hospital: Insider Tips for Avoiding Hospital Mistakes for Yourself or Someone You Love*. Thomas A. Sharon. Chicago: Contemporary Books; 2004.
- *Speak Up – Planning your Follow-Up Care*. The Joint Commission. http://www.jointcommission.org/Speak_Up_Planning_Your_Follow-up_Care/
- *You The Smart Patient: An Insider's Handbook for Getting the Best Treatment*. Michael F. Roizen and Mehmet C. Ox. New York, NY: Free Press; 2006.