
Preparing for hospital

Summary

- It's important to know why you are going to hospital.
 - Before you go into hospital, ask your doctor to explain anything you do not understand about your health or hospital visit.
 - Organise time off work and for someone to help out with your family life before your hospital visit.
 - If you get sick in the days before you go into hospital, phone the hospital and tell them. Your hospital visit may need to be changed to another date, when you are feeling better.
 - Take all your medication with you to hospital. Try and keep it in its original boxes if possible.
 - If you think you will need extra help when you get home, arrange this before you go into hospital.
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It helps to be well prepared when you are going into hospital. This includes knowing what to take, finding someone to look after your home, work and family life, and making arrangements for your return home.

Preparing for your hospital stay

There are a number of things to think about when you are planning for a stay in hospital.

Staying healthy

Before you go into hospital, try and stay as healthy as you can. Eat healthy foods, drink less alcohol, limit smoking and get lots of rest.

If you become sick in the days before you go into hospital, phone the hospital and tell them.

For your safety, your hospital stay may need to be changed to another date, when you are feeling better.

Taking time off work

As soon as you can, let your employer know that will need time away from work. They may need to find someone to help do your job while you are in hospital and at home recovering. For example, you might not be able to do any heavy lifting for a few weeks after you come out of hospital, so they will need to find someone who can do this work for you.

Asking questions

If there is something you don't understand about your health or hospital visit, ask your doctor as many questions as you need to, before you go into hospital.

Some questions you may want to ask include:

- Why am I going to hospital?
- What is the procedure or surgery I am having?
- Are there any possible side effects or complications of this surgery or treatment?
- How long will I take to get better?
- Will I need to stop eating or drinking on the day of the procedure? If so, for how long?
- How long will I stay in hospital for?
- What type of help will I need for when I go home?

Managing home and family life

Depending on how long you need to stay in hospital, you might need to ask a friend, family member or neighbour

to look after any of your other family members, pets or plants, as well as collect your mail and pay your bills.

Travelling to hospital

Think about transport and work out how you will travel to the hospital – will you drive, get a ride with someone, take a taxi or use public transport?

Whichever travel option you choose, give yourself lots of time to get there. You may want to arrange to have someone take you to hospital on the day, so you don't have to worry about driving yourself and finding a park.

It's a good idea to phone the hospital the day before you go in (or earlier, if they have asked you to) to confirm that you are coming in for your surgery or treatment.

Using support networks

Some people like to have a family member or close friend with them for support when they go into hospital for surgery or treatment. If you would like this support, ask your family member or friend as far in advance as possible, so they can organise to spend time with you on the day of your surgery or procedure.

Tell your family and close friends that you are going into hospital and ask one family member or friend to be your main contact during your hospital stay. You can then ask any other friends and family members to contact that person about your recovery, rather than everyone calling you at the hospital.

Tell your main family member, friend or carer about your wishes should something unexpected happen to you, such as death. You may want to tell them things like:

- where your important papers are stored (for example, your will)
- who you would like to represent you if you cannot communicate anymore
- what treatment you want
- whether you will donate your organs
- who you want to look after any other people in your care (for example, your children, a person with a disability or older parents).

What to take to hospital

It can be hard to know what things to bring with you when going into hospital. If you're unsure, ask the hospital staff, who may be able to give you an idea of what you'll need.

Personal items

Hospital rooms don't have a lot of personal space, so take only the personal things you need for your hospital stay.

Some items you may want to take with you could be:

- your address book with important details, including your local doctor's name, address and telephone number
- a notebook to record important information, such as questions to ask medical staff
- pyjamas
- toothbrush, hairbrush, deodorant and razor
- comfortable clothes that are not too tight
- books or magazines
- eyeglasses
- healthy snacks
- Medicare card, healthcare card, Veterans' Affairs card
- any equipment you need to help you move (such as a walking stick) or communicate (such as a hearing aid)
- mobile phone or tablet and charger
- any paperwork the hospital has asked you to fill out.

Do not bring:

- a lot of money
- expensive things, like jewellery and watches
- too much clothing
- alcohol.

Medication

When you go into hospital, take all your medication with you, in its original packaging if possible. Also bring a list of your medication, including how much you take, so the medical staff know what medication you use. This should include any over-the-counter medication, vitamins or herbal supplements you use.

Some medication you take may affect your treatment and your doctor may have to ask you to stop taking it.

Coming home from hospital

It's a good idea to organise your transport home before you leave hospital.

When you come home from hospital, you may feel very tired and not be able to do things around the house, like cooking or cleaning.

Meals

Before you go into hospital, cook some meals or buy some frozen meals and store them in your freezer. This means you will have something ready to eat when you come home and won't have to use up lots of energy to cook for yourself. Friends or family may also offer to cook meals for you.

If you do need to cook for yourself, keep all your food and cooking tools together, so you don't have to move around too much.

Home services

Find out about and organise any services you may need at home, such as district nursing or home help through your local council.

The hospital may refer you to a post-acute care program (this is when a group of healthcare professionals visits you regularly at home and works with you to make sure you are recovering well after your hospital visit).

You can ask about these support programs when you are in hospital.

If you will be spending a lot of time in bed as part of your recovery, put the telephone, your doctor's number and any other important numbers in a place that is easy to reach from your bed.

Where to get help

- Your local doctor
- Your surgeon

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