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## Preparing to leave hospital

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### Summary

- Before you leave hospital, make sure you and your family are clear about what you have to do to care for yourself at home.
  - Before you leave hospital, make sure you understand what medication you need and when to take it.
  - Make sure you know what activities you will not be able to do yourself at home. Organise to get help with these activities if you need it, for example, nursing care or Meals on Wheels.
  - Write down all your follow-up appointments and tests.
  - Make a list of people and services you can call on at home for medical and emotional support.
  - If you want to leave hospital early or do not feel ready to go home on your discharge date, talk with your healthcare professional or hospital social worker.
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Before you go home after a hospital stay, it is important that you speak with your family and your healthcare team so that everyone is clear about what you need to do when you leave. Start your hospital discharge (transfer of care) planning early, so you can be sure all the support you need is organised before you go home.

### Hospital discharge process

Your healthcare professional will develop a plan with you for your discharge from hospital and your ongoing care.

When speaking with your healthcare professional:

- Make sure you understand anything you have to do before leaving hospital – this might include going over your hospital discharge plan, picking up any aids or equipment you need for your recovery (for example, a walking stick) or filling a prescription.
- Be clear about anything you have to do at home to help you recover. This may include doing certain exercises, avoiding heavy lifting, drinking lots of fluids, changing your dressing or taking medication. Ask as many questions as you need to make sure you understand. It may also help to take some notes so you do not forget important information.
- Ask what activities you will be able to do once you get home, such as driving, bathing and climbing stairs.
- Understand what the warning signs might be that will mean you have to call a healthcare professional or return to hospital.
- Check if there are any follow-up appointments you need to make with your healthcare professional or at an outpatient clinic. Record these dates in your phone or diary, along with any special instructions for these appointments (for example, not eating before a blood test).

### Forms and payment when leaving hospital

Before leaving hospital, make sure you complete all the forms and documents you need to, pick up prescription medication, and arrange to pay for any services or products that are not covered by Medicare or your private health insurance.

The things you might have to pay for may include:

- pharmacy items not opened when you leave hospital
- aids supplied for use at home (such as a raised toilet seat or a splint)
- pay TV, internet access, movies and non-local phone calls
- patient-requested non-emergency ambulance transportation.

### Medication information before leaving hospital

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Ask staff if you have any questions about your medication. Some things you may want to consider:

- Make sure you know what prescription or over-the-counter medication your healthcare professional has prescribed. Check dosages and instructions for taking them.
- Tell the staff what medication, vitamins or supplements you took before you were admitted. Ask if you should still take these after you leave hospital.
- Write down the name and phone number of a person to call if you have questions about your medication.

### **Organising family support**

Speak with your family or carer before your hospital discharge so they are clear about what they need to do to help you. Make sure you and your family or carer understand any special instructions such as giving you medication or changing bandages. Your healthcare professional can show you, your family or carer how to do these tasks.

Organise your transport home. If a family member is picking you up, make sure they know what time you will be discharged and if you need anything for the car trip home, such as a soft cushion to sit on.

If you are going to need some extra help at home, organise who is going to do this. Explain any instructions they need for your care or ask them to speak with your healthcare team directly.

### **Organising community support**

Your healthcare team at the hospital will probably arrange any support programs you need on discharge. If you need aids and equipment, these will have to be organised ahead of time.

Spend some time with your healthcare professionals working out what you may need, how to access aids and equipment and if you will need to pay for them.

There are also a wide range of support networks available, ranging from social and peer support (such as online and in-person support groups) through to condition-specific support organisations (such as **Cancer Council Victoria** and **beyondblue**).

### **Going home after having a baby**

Before you go home after having a baby, speak with your healthcare professionals to make sure you are ready and prepared.

Some things you may want to discuss could be:

- breastfeeding and recognising when your baby is getting enough milk (including expressing breastmilk)
- sterilising and making up bottles safely if you are feeding your baby with infant formula
- changing nappies
- bathing your baby
- settling your baby.

Looking after your baby will no doubt be your primary focus, but looking after yourself is just as important. Ask your healthcare professional or midwife about:

- exercises for your back and pelvic floor
- postnatal depression
- how to take care of yourself
- who to call and where to get good information if you need help (such as the Maternal and Child Health Line on 13 22 29).
- support services close to home.

Make sure you have a properly fitted baby capsule for the car trip home. This is not only for your baby's safety, it is a legal requirement. The **RACV** and **VicRoads** have a network of stations throughout Victoria that can help make sure your baby seat is fitted properly. Contact either organisation for more information.

## **Going home after a transport accident**

The Transport Accident Commission has an **information sheet** for people who are leaving hospital after a transport accident. This can help you ensure the process is as smooth as possible.

## **Not wanting to leave hospital**

You may feel like you are not ready to go home when the healthcare professional tells you it is time. Perhaps you do not feel strong enough – mentally or physically. Speak to your healthcare professional or the hospital social worker about your concerns.

There are many options for support at home and programs to help you transition from hospital to home.

## **Wanting to leave hospital earlier**

You might find you want to leave hospital before your healthcare professional says you are ready. It is your choice to refuse treatment at any time and go home whenever you wish. However, if your healthcare professional recommends that you need the kind of care that is only available in a hospital, you should consider this in planning the services that you may need.

In some cases, you might be able to talk about your concerns and work out a way that you can return home safely with the help of some extra support.

## **When recovery is not going as planned**

If you are feeling unwell once you get home or your recovery is not progressing as expected; review your hospital discharge plan and follow its instructions.

Contact your healthcare professional or call NURSE-ON-CALL (1300 60 60 24) if you feel you need to check anything with a healthcare professional.

## **Providing feedback about your care**

If you would like to provide feedback about your care before you leave hospital, you can speak with the nurse in charge of your ward. If you have a problem about your care, you can also speak with the hospital's patient liaison officer.

## **Where to get help**

- Your healthcare professional
- Hospital social worker
- Patient liaison officer
- Maternal and Child Health Line, call 13 22 29
- NURSE-ON-CALL, call 1300 60 60 24

## **You might also be interested in:**

- **Care at home**
- **Care in the community**
- **Leaving hospital**

**This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:**

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