

Tips For A Safe Hospital Visit

Take a list of your medications with you when you go to the hospital. Include prescriptions, over-the-counter medicines and dietary supplements such as vitamins and herbs. Make sure that you list the name of the drug, the amount you take and when you take it.

If your doctor prescribes medications for you to take while in the hospital, ask for the name of each medication and the reasons you are taking it.

Before you take any medicine in the hospital, look at it. If it doesn't look like what you usually take, ask why. It might be a generic drug, or it might be the wrong drug. Ask the same questions you would ask if you were in a pharmacy.

Allow hospital staff to check your hospital ID bracelet every time you receive medication. This helps prevent you from getting someone else's medications.

Before any test or procedure, ask if it will require any dyes or medicines. Remind your nurse and doctor if you have allergies.

Hand washing is an important way to prevent the spread of infections in hospitals. Encourage health care workers who have direct contact with you to wash their hands regularly.

While in the hospital following surgery:

- Wash your hands carefully after handling any type of soiled material. This is especially important after you have gone to the bathroom.
- If you have an intravenous catheter (IV), keep the skin around the dressing clean and dry. Tell your nurse promptly if the dressing becomes loose or gets wet.
- Likewise, if you have a dressing on a wound, let your nurse know promptly if it becomes loose or gets wet.
- If you have a catheter to your bladder or any other drainage tube, let your nurse know promptly if it becomes loose or dislodged.
- Carefully follow your doctor's instructions regarding breathing treatments and getting out of bed. Don't be afraid to ask for help, advice or sufficient pain medications.
- If possible, ask your friends and relatives not to visit if they feel ill.

When your hospital discharges you, ask your doctor or nurse to explain the treatment plan you will use at home.

This includes learning about your medicines and finding out when you can get back to your regular activities. Research shows that at discharge time, doctors think their patients understand more than they really do about what they should or should not do when they return home. Ask the doctor or nurse to write the purpose for medications on the prescription. Many drug names look alike. Knowing the purpose helps you and the pharmacist double-check the prescription.

Follow-Up Appointments

Make sure that your treatment plan includes information about which doctors you need to follow up with once you are home and when. It's always a good idea to make an appointment with your personal physician to ensure that your primary doctor knows about any conditions you have, what medications you are taking and what care his or her office may need to coordinate.

Know what other types of care you will need, such as physical therapy, home health care or cardiac rehabilitation. Ask about whether you need to make these appointments yourself or whether the hospital will schedule the first one for you.

What to Do When You Get Home

Check to make sure you understand your doctor's instructions about bathing, becoming active again (such as cooking, cleaning or driving) and foods you need to eat or avoid eating.

Realize that you will probably be weaker than usual and may need help caring for yourself. This care may include bathing, cooking, cleaning, grocery shopping and driving you to doctor's appointments. Consider which family members and friends will be able to help you once you are home and ask for their assistance.