

Caregiving
Pathways™

How to help your loved one in the hospital

You can make a difference



If you help a family member with a health condition, you're a family caregiver.

You can make a difference.

The most important things you can do to help a loved one in the hospital are:

1. Ask questions until everything makes sense.
2. Write down what happens...because there's too much to remember.
3. Tell doctors what's important to your loved one. Explain what types of treatments he or she does and doesn't want.

Your loved one may be too sick to understand and remember everything that happens in the hospital. You can do a lot to help him or her get the best care.

You can also help plan for providing care at home, after the hospital. The better prepared you are to help at home, the sooner your loved one can recover. And a better, faster recovery means it's less likely that he or she will return to the hospital with a problem.



The 3 most important jobs in the hospital

1. The doctor's job is to make medical decisions.

2. The nurse's job is to care for patients and give medications.

3. Your caregiving job is to:

- Write down what happens in case you forget later. The information will help you and the one you're caring for make good medical decisions.
- Help doctors and nurses learn what's important to your loved one. Help share the patient's feelings, hopes, and fears.
- Share the information with family and friends so that busy doctors and nurses won't need to answer the same questions from other people.
- Learn how to help your loved one get better at home after the hospital. The more you know, the less likely she'll go back to the hospital with a problem.



3 great ways to help manage your loved one's health

1. Understand the power you have as a family caregiver. Tell each doctor and nurse:

- *I'm the family caregiver. I'll be helping and keeping track of everything that happens.*
- *I know this person best, and I'll be helping make medical decisions. I want to be there when you talk about the care you're planning.*

Tell doctors about situations such as depression, dementia, or hearing loss. Conditions like these may not be noticeable right away. But they can affect your loved one's ability to manage his or her hospital experience.

2. Ask how to get and give information about your loved one's care.

Ask each doctor:

- *Do I need to sign a form to get medical information?*
- *What's the best way to get information from you?*
- *If I'm at work, could you share information with the family member who's here?*
- *What problems should I call you about, and what shouldn't I call you about?*

Find out when each doctor does rounds (when the doctor goes around the hospital seeing patients one by one). Take notes. Or have a family member do it. Ask the most important questions first. Be brief, so there's time for more questions.

Ask about the patient's status and how it affects costs. Being under observation is different from being admitted.

3. Have a family member stay with your loved one as much as possible to make sure that:

- Doctors discuss test results with you and the patient and what happens next
- The meals are as prescribed and expected (examples: diabetic diet, low sodium)
- Nurses know about pain, bowel movements, urination, and vomiting
(Pardon us, but it may be easier to remember these as the four Ps:
pain, poop, pee, and puke.)

3 great ways to prevent common hospital mistakes

1. Ask everyone who enters your loved one's hospital room to wash their hands.

One in 25 patients across the United States gets a new infection in the hospital. Hand washing is the single best way to help keep the one you're caring for from getting a new infection.

2. Review all of your loved one's medications daily.

The most common mistakes are medication errors. Look for anything new, stopped, changed, missing, or duplicated. Check dosages and look for side effects and allergies.

3. Keep a daily journal in the room. When you can't be there, ask a family member to take notes.

Write down the care plan each day, what to expect, doctor names and conditions they treat, evaluations, diagnoses, medications, side effects, tests, results, and complications. This will help you notice what works well and when something doesn't make sense.

When you have questions, ask: Could you help me understand something?



3 great ways to keep your loved one from going back to the hospital

1. Talk with the discharge planner long before your family member leaves the hospital.

Tell a nurse: *I'd like to talk to the discharge planner so I know how to take care of my loved one after she's discharged and goes home. I want to get everything ready now. I want to make sure she doesn't end up back in the hospital.*

2. Ask the discharge planner these questions and write down the answers.

- Could you give me prescriptions now for the medications we'll need at home? I want to get them at the drugstore before she leaves the hospital.
- Is there any training to help me care for her at home?
- What problems should I call about, and what shouldn't I call about? Who should I call?

3. Make sure the information you get at discharge isn't missing anything.

Have medications, supplies, and equipment at home before your loved one leaves the hospital. Have a nurse show you how to take care of any wounds, give medications, and work any equipment.

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