

Navigating a Hospital Stay

Adapted from Clear Cane Chronicles: Shaping the Future of Healthcare Through Person-Centered Care

Better healthcare depends on informed questions, engaged communities, and decisions that reflect people's needs.

What to Bring

This guide shares practical tips for navigating a hospital stay. It complements the other Questions That Matter guides by focusing on everyday life in the hospital.

- Insurance card(s), photo ID, a notebook and pen, loved one's contact information
- A current list of your medications, allergies, dietary restrictions, providers, and emergency contacts
- Preferred toiletries and comfort items (such as earplugs, an eye mask, or your favorite pillow)
- Eyeglasses, hearing aids, dentures, or other assistive devices
- Comfortable loungewear
- Electronics, chargers, headphones, reading materials, or other items to help pass the time
- Leave valuables at home in a secure location

Working With Your Healthcare Team

- Learn and document the names and roles of the people caring for you.
- Build a positive working relationship with your healthcare team.
- Share what matters most to you, including your goals, concerns, and priorities.
- Explain your needs and preferences for personal care, such as bathing, grooming, and dressing.
- Speak up if something doesn't seem right or you don't feel safe.
- Discuss financial concerns early rather than waiting until you receive a bill.
- Contact the patient advocate or patient representative if repeated requests or call bells go unanswered.

Making Yourself Comfortable

- Don't hesitate to ask for privacy during conversations about your health and during personal care.
- Tell your healthcare team if you are in pain and ask about other options if you're not getting relief.
- Inform a member of your healthcare team if noise, light, temperature, visitors, or other environmental factors make you uncomfortable.
- Keep important items within easy reach.
- Ask about activities or resources that can help pass the time and support your well-being.

Engaging Family and Friends

- Choose one trusted person to coordinate visits and share updates (with your permission).
- Let visitors know when you need time to rest.
- Ask family or friends to bring items from home that will make your stay more comfortable

- Ask a trusted person to help manage household and financial responsibilities, if needed.

Practicing Safety

- Do your part to prevent the spread of germs.
- Speak up if someone forgets to wash their hands or wear appropriate protective equipment.
- Tell your healthcare team if you notice changes in your skin, wound, IV site, or symptoms.
- If something doesn't seem right, trust your instincts and ask questions.

Many hospital rules are designed to protect you and other patients. Following them helps keep everyone safe.

Preparing to Go Home

- Practice any new skills you'll need before leaving the hospital.
- Before discharge, determine any home support, equipment, or services you'll need.
- Make sure your discharge plan fits your daily life and the support you'll have at home.
- Keep discharge papers and medication list with you to help if you need follow-up care or if information isn't immediately available.

Questions to Ask the Healthcare Team

Consider the questions that may be helpful to your situation.

- What should I know or practice before I leave the hospital?
- What can I do now to make my recovery at home easier?
- What could delay my discharge?
- What problems or symptoms should prompt me to seek medical attention? Who should I contact?
- What can I do now to avoid unexpected healthcare costs?

People and Services to Know

Hospitalist

Coordinates care and communicates with the healthcare team during your stay.

Charge Nurse

Coordinates nursing care and helps address concerns.

Care Coordination (Social Worker, Care Coordinator, or Discharge Planner)

Helps coordinate discharge planning and connect you with transportation, caregiving, financial assistance, and community resources.

Patient Advocate or Patient Relations

Helps address concerns about your care experience.

Financial Counselor

Explains hospital bills and financial assistance programs.

Care coordination titles and responsibilities vary by hospital.

Closing

Healthcare for people who live in the real world, not in a medical chart.

You can help make your hospital stay safer, more comfortable, and more conducive to recovery.

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This guide reflects the U.S. healthcare system and is a living document that continues to evolve.