

Your Hospital Survival Guide

10 things to do before you are admitted

You don't always have time to plan for a hospital admission. But most often you do, even if it's just a few days. Planning for that visit can lead to better care and faster care. So use that time to take these steps:

1 Get briefed. Schedule an appointment with your doctor as far in advance of your hospital admission as possible to talk about the drugs and supplements you should start or stop, the dietary changes you should make, and the pre-admission tests you need. Also ask about the medication, tests, and procedures you can expect once you check in, and how long you might have to stay.



2 Make a drug list. Review with your doctor all of the prescription and over-the-counter drugs you take, as well as the vitamins, minerals, herbs, and other dietary supplements. Bring multiple copies of

the list with you to the hospital so doctors and pharmacists there can check for any interactions or duplicates with medication they may want to give you.

3 Schedule surgery for well-staffed times, if possible. Hospital staffing can be skimpy on weekends and at night. Nonemergency procedures slated for Mondays are sometimes delayed or bumped because of spillover from emergency cases during the weekend. And if surgery is done on a Friday, you might get reduced postoperative care over the weekend. So ask if you can have your surgery on a Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday morning. That way staffing will be at full capacity during your immediate postoperative hours, when you'll need the most care.

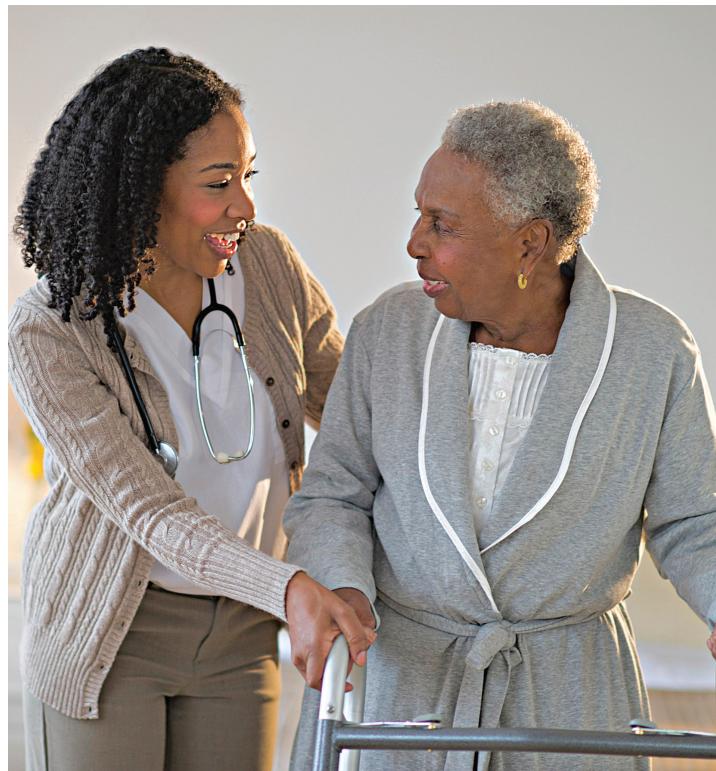
4 Know your heart-attack risk. If you're going to the hospital for surgery and are 50 or older, your doctor should check your risk of having a heart attack or stroke, and, if you're at high risk, consider whether you'll need medication to protect your heart or prevent blood clots.

5 Assign a helper. Before your hospital admission, ask a friend or family member to help monitor your care, since you might be too ill or distracted to do it on your own. Your hospital helper can assert your needs and preferences, ask questions, record the answers, retain copies of key medical documents, and advocate for you if problems arise. Ideally, your companion should help you during check-in and discharge, and visit daily, especially in the evening and on weekends and holidays.

6 Prepare a living will and choose a health-care proxy. This should be done long before you even think about going to a hospital, but if you haven't executed a living will or designated a health-care proxy yet, now's a good time. A living will states your preferences for medical intervention if you become incapacitated, enter a coma, or develop a life-threatening condition. It can specify that you don't want overly aggressive or prolonged care, for example. Make sure the admitting doctor and the hospital have a copy of the will. Also appoint a health-care proxy, someone you designate to make medical decisions for you if you become incapacitated or a decision is needed while you're unconscious. That person should have copy of your living will and understand your health-care priorities.

■ Have a friend or family member stay with you as much as possible when you're in the hospital.

9 Pack a bag. Don't include valuables, but do bring a few comforting items: a music player and headphones; a favorite pillow, blanket, or robe; or a photo or two. Such items offer reassurance and can make you seem like more of a real person to staff.



7 Bank your blood. Blood transfusions generally pose a very slight risk of transmitting an infectious disease. Still, some people prefer banking their own blood before their hospital admission if they're undergoing a procedure that could require a transfusion.

8 Quit smoking, even temporarily. You won't be allowed to smoke in the hospital anyway, and stopping as long as possible before admission can speed your recovery and reduce the risk of infection and other problems.

10 Consider being screened for MRSA. Finding out whether you have low levels of methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*, a potentially deadly bacterium that's resistant to many antibiotics, before surgery might allow hospital staff members to take steps to prevent it from worsening or spreading to other patients.

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