

Speak Up: Planning Your Recovery

Your Recovery

An important part of your recovery is making sure that after you leave the hospital you get the care you need to get better.

A nurse, social worker or discharge planner should help plan your follow-up care. If no one is assigned to help with your discharge plan, tell your doctor or nurse.

If you have trouble understanding the language being used, you should be provided with translated documents or an interpreter. If you have trouble hearing, you should ask for instructions in writing.

You will be given important directions about your follow-up care, including written instructions. If you follow these directions, you will have a greater chance of getting well faster. You are also less likely to need to go back to the hospital.

This fact sheet provides tips to help you get more involved in your care. It also gives you the information you need for the best possible recovery.

Find Out About Your Condition

- Ask about your condition and how soon you should feel better.
- Find out about your ability to do everyday activities like walk, climb stairs, go to the bathroom, prepare meals, drive, return to work, and other activities that are important to you.
- Find out about any special instructions for daily activities. For example, most patients should use the shower instead of the bathtub.
- Find out how much help you will need during your recovery. For example, if someone should be with you 24 hours a day.
- Ask about any signs and symptoms for which you should watch. Find out what you should do if you have these signs or symptoms.
- Make sure your home is set up to help with any physical limitations you may have. Make sure any equipment you need is set up before you return home. The hospital can provide information about where to get equipment.
- Write down any questions you have and ask them before you leave the hospital. It's helpful to keep a notebook for your questions, the answers and who answered your questions, in case you need to get more information. If needed, ask a family member or friend to help.
- Ask a family member or friend to be with you when discharge plans are being made, or to go through the discharge process with you. He or she can help get written instructions and ask questions.
- Ask for the phone number of a person to call at the hospital for any problems you may have after leaving the hospital, or call your doctor's office.

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- Ask a family member, friend or neighbor to stay with you when you first get home and then to check on you at your home for a few days.
- If you are not confident about how to care for yourself after leaving the hospital, or if you have any doubts about getting the care you need at home, speak up. Ask to speak to the nurse in charge, or ask your nurse, social worker or discharge planner if you could be referred to a home health agency that could come to your home to make sure your needs are being met.

Find Out About Your Needed Medicines

- Ask for a list of all the medicines you will be taking at home. The list should include all of your medicines, not just new ones started in the hospital. Check the list for accuracy. You or your doctor should also share the list with anyone providing you with follow-up care.
- Ask for written directions about your medicines. Read the directions and make sure you understand them. Ask any questions you have before leaving the hospital.
- Tell your doctors, nurses and pharmacists about all the medicines, vitamins and herbs you usually take. Ask if there are any of these that you should not take with your new medicines.
- Ask if there are any foods and drinks – including alcohol – that you should avoid.
- Ask about the side effects of your new medicines. Find out what you should do if you experience any of them.
- Find out if your medicines can make you sleepy or forgetful, which could make it difficult for you to take your medicines on time.
- Find out if your medicines can make you dizzy or confused, which could cause you to fall.

Find Out About Your Follow-up Care

- Ask for directions about physical exercises you may need to do. Ask your doctor, nurse, or physical therapist to write down the directions.
- If you have a wound, ask for directions on how you should take care of it.
- If you need special equipment, make sure you know how to use it, where you can get it, and if it's covered by your insurance, Medicare, or other health plan.
- Ask about any tests that need to be followed up on after you leave the hospital and who you should follow up with to get the results.
- Find out about any follow-up visits with your doctor or other caregiver. Make sure you have transportation to get there. Many cities provide transportation for the elderly or disabled.
- Review your insurance to find out what costs are covered and not covered after you are discharged (like medicines and equipment).
- If you need to receive home care services or you need to be sent to a nursing home or assisted living center for follow-up care, make sure that the facility or service is covered by your insurance, Medicare, or other health plan; and that it is licensed or accredited. Joint Commission organizations and programs are listed at qualitycheck.org.