



PLANNING FOR A SCHEDULED HOSPITAL STAY

By the AHA Member Services Committee

No one looks forward to a hospital stay, but a little planning can make it a bit less daunting.

PREPARATION

Every hospital, doctor, and insurance company has its own procedure to follow before a planned hospital stay.

- Read over and make sure you understand any material or instructions provided by your doctor several times well in advance of your stay. It's a good idea to go over these with another person. Resolve any concerns or questions you have about this material or the procedure either at a pre-admission doctor visit or by calling your doctor's office.
- Pay careful attention to your doctor's instructions about stopping medications and supplements and changes in diet, perhaps even writing these on your calendar. Sometimes you must start this part of the preparation a week or more in advance. Find out when you should resume your usual routine. **GET ALL INSTRUCTIONS IN WRITING.**
- Schedule and complete all pre-operative testing as directed. (This might be done in an MD office or clinic, or at the hospital.) This is typically done close to the time of your procedure.
- Check to see if you need to alert your insurance company and follow through with their processes for authorization.
- Complete any hospital pre-registration processes or medical forms as directed.



- Notify your primary care physician (PCP) of your planned hospitalization. If you don't have one, consider getting/seeing one before you go into the hospital.
- Be sure to bring your insurance information or cards with you to the hospital.
- Arrange for someone to go with you to the hospital, visit regularly, and act as an advocate if the need arises. You may be able to have someone with you until you go into the operating room for a procedure.
- If you are comfortable with this, give your friend/loved one/advocate a key to your home so he or she can retrieve forgotten or needed items.
- Update your list of medications (including eye drops, supplements, vitamins, herbals, and over-the-counter medications) and bring at least one copy with you to the hospital. It is also a good idea to keep a list in your purse or wallet. Be sure to date the list each time you update it.
- Set up your bathroom, bedroom and kitchen to make things easier for you when you get home. Keep commonly needed items within easy reach (for instance, keep a plate, bowl, glass, cup/mug, silverware on the counter or a low shelf. Keep your cell phone handy.) Remove any trip hazards. Set up any adaptive devices you may need after your surgery.
- Clear your home voicemail and your cell phone so there is room for people to leave messages.
- Consider making and freezing single-serving meals that you can easily microwave.
- Let AHA know of your planned hospital stay and arrange for any extra help that may be needed from AHA.
- Likewise, notify AHA if you will need a temporary volunteer "buddy" to assist with some post-hospitalization errands or assistance.
- Have a plan for someone to be present at discharge and provide transportation home. This person may need to obtain any new



medications or supplies. AHA can also provide some assistance with transportation or errands.

- Make arrangements for pet and plant care.

WHAT TO BRING TO THE HOSPITAL

- A picture identification, such as a driver's license or passport
- Insurance information/cards
- Allergy information, as people occasionally keep on bracelets or in document form
- Medication information, including dosage and reasons you are taking it. Include eye drops, minerals and vitamins, any herbal supplements and over the counter medications including creams and ointments as well as all your prescription medications
- A living will or other legal documents such as Power of Attorney for Healthcare
- A list of contacts (friends and family, your physicians, as well as AHA!) and how to reach them
- Cell phone, toiletries, something light to read or easy activities

PREPARING TO COME HOME

- Meet with the discharge planner together with your caregiver or advocate. Know your options when you leave the hospital. Will you need rehab at a facility, skilled home health care, hired help to assist you with personal care, or meals and household tasks? If outside help is being arranged, get the name of the company and contact information as well as specifics of what they are to do and when.



- Do not be afraid to advocate for yourself and ask any questions that you may have during your stay. Hospitals have patient advocates available to any who want one.
- Get the name of the hospital contact person to call with questions or concerns after you leave the hospital in case your doctor's office is unable to answer them before your next appointment.
- Make sure you have a written copy of the discharge instructions including:
 - a. A complete list of medications to be taken when you get home (The doctor in the hospital should have reconciled the medicines you used to take before hospitalization with any new medications.)
Keep this information together and close at hand.
 - b. Any ongoing procedures (dressing changes, wound care, injections, etc.) or treatments you will need, including instructions, and who will be performing or assisting with these
 - c. Any signs and symptoms that you should report to your doctor
 - d. Activities permitted (such as driving, showering) and those to be avoided
 - e. Any scheduled follow-up appointment
- If outside help or skilled home care is being arranged, get the name of the company and contact information.
- Confirm any follow up appointments that have been made or that need to be made soon after you return home.
- Make sure you and any friend or advocate who is with you understand all instructions, as you could still be groggy from medications or anesthesia. Do not be afraid to ask questions.
- Arrange for someone to be with you on the day of discharge to pick up needed medications, food, and any medical or other supplies you might need. Contact AHA if you need help with this.



AFTER COMING HOME

- You will need to answer your phone and/or check your messages. You may want to keep a telephone near you at all times when you return home after hospitalization. You may get calls from home care workers from their cell phones to arrange visits, and they will need to reach you before they come to see you.
- Keep the discharge instructions in a readily available place. Review these once you are home.
- Review the discharge medication list and make sure you have all the medications. It is sometimes helpful to write out a medication schedule to follow since there may be new and or changed meds.
- Make follow up appointments as needed.
- Call AHA for extra help as needed.
- Follow any instructions about activities permitted such as exercises, diet, and walking, showering. Pace yourself! Listen to your body.
- Accept offers of help from family and friends. Ask for things if you need them.
- You may wish to limit visitors or set a time limit for visits so that you have the rest you need for your recovery.
- Do not hesitate to call your hospital contact number or your doctor or nurse with questions or concerns including any symptoms you may develop.
- Take pain medication as instructed; you will actually heal faster if your pain is managed. If you are unable to manage your pain, call your doctor.

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