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## Tips on Preparing for a Hospital Stay

At some point in life it is likely that you will experience the need for specialized care at a hospital facility. A sudden illness, the need for surgery, scheduled tests, or a child's broken arm – could require admission to a hospital. Many people are anxious about the hospital environment or fear of the unknown. Hospitals can be places bustling with activity. The swirl of paperwork, people, equipment, and unfamiliar surroundings can be confusing or overwhelming. If you or someone in your family is scheduled for a hospital stay, taking some time to prepare may make your experience more comfortable and less stressful. Planning ahead will help you understand what to expect before admission to the hospital and ensures you will be more prepared when you are admitted. The following tips may help you anticipate what to expect, what you might need to bring with you, questions to ask, and how to remain an active participant in your care. The desired outcome is that you will have the information you need to keep you safe, shorten your stay, and speed your recovery.

### Decisions

Before scheduling a surgery or a procedure, your provider will most likely explain the risks and benefits of what is being recommended and discuss all your options which may include a "watch and wait" approach as well. Ideally, your procedure should be scheduled after you have had time to consider your options and weigh the risks and benefits of treatments for your situation. If you are having surgery, here are a few questions you might want to ask your surgeon:<sup>1</sup> How many of these operations did you do last year? How many did the hospital do? What was your complication rate, and how does it compare with national averages? The KnovaSolutions newsletters [Finding the Right Hospital for You](#) and [Choosing a Doctor](#) will provide tips and resources to help you assess whether physicians and hospitals are meeting national standards and how they compare in terms of safety, quality, and other measures.

### Preparations

Once you schedule your admission, take time to gather all the necessary paperwork and identification documents. You might consider bringing a folder, preferably one that can be securely closed to keep everything in one place and prevent loss.<sup>2</sup> Documentation you may need includes:

- ◆ Insurance cards and information. Know what your insurance covers.
- ◆ A list of all the medications and over the counter products you are currently taking.
- ◆ A list of allergies to medications, foods, or to latex exposure.
- ◆ A list of phone numbers of family and friends and emergency contacts.
- ◆ A written power of attorney, living will, or any advanced directives you may have.

Other items you might consider bringing include comfortable clothing such as pajamas, socks, or a cardigan to keep warm, toiletries, pen and paper to take notes or write down questions, a prepaid phone card for calls from your room, and a small amount of money for vending machines or newspapers. Bringing credit cards, large amounts of cash, or jewelry are not recommended since theft or loss does occur in hospitals. Check the hospital's policy before bringing any electronic items.<sup>2</sup>

You may have a preadmission appointment with the hospital before your surgery or procedure. Be sure to advise the staff regarding negative reactions during diagnostic procedures or any allergies you may have. Tell them about any communication issues you or your family member may have such as hearing loss, a language barrier, or visual impairment.<sup>3</sup> If you are having surgery and will need a blood transfusion, ask if you can pre-donate blood to yourself.<sup>1</sup>



Your provider may give you a list of instructions to follow regarding food, medications, or other activities necessary prior to the procedure. For example, you may be told to stop taking aspirin a week or two before surgery in order to prevent excessive bleeding. It is critical that all instructions are followed completely. Failure to do so may lead to complications or cause your procedure to be delayed or cancelled.

The day has arrived and you have been admitted to the hospital for your procedure. Be prepared to state your name, birth date, and what procedure you are having repeatedly to multiple nurses or staff involved in your care. The repetition may seem odd or comical, but this practice demonstrates a hospital's safety focus. A hospital following safety guidelines issued by the Joint Commission (a hospital accrediting body) will do this practice to prevent medical errors such as performing the wrong procedure or giving a medication to the wrong patient. Speak up and ask questions if you are **not** asked before a nurse, technician, or physician does or administers anything.<sup>1</sup>

Prior to leaving the hospital you will receive paperwork and a list of instructions such as the medications you will need to take or other post surgery instructions to aid your recovery. A study in 2005 indicated that a significant number of people experience adverse drug events following hospital discharge, so it is particularly important to understand what your medications are and how to take them.<sup>4</sup> Having a family member or friend present during your discharge can help you recall what is said. Ask questions if you are confused or don't understand the instructions. When you are home if something is confusing or does not seem right, call your provider for advice.<sup>5</sup>

### Children and hospitals

If your child is scheduled for a procedure, here are a few tips from UCLA's Children's Hospital to prepare a child at any age for a hospital stay:<sup>6</sup>

- ◆ Talk to your child (under the age of 5) a day or two before the experience. Older children should have a few days to a week to get information and ask questions.
- ◆ Be careful not to force a discussion if your child does not seem ready.
- ◆ Be honest. If you do not know the answer, tell your child you do not know, but you will find out.
- ◆ Use words your child will understand.
- ◆ Encourage your child to discuss feelings and ask questions about the upcoming experience.
- ◆ Have your child pack a suitcase with the things he or she wants in the hospital. Some children may be able to wear their own pajamas to sleep in, but depending on the medical situation, some children may be required to wear hospital gowns.
- ◆ Children's responses to hospitalization and medical procedures will differ, depending on their age, the procedures being done, and their past experiences. Be prepared for possible changes in your child's behavior.



If you or someone in your family is going to the hospital, preparing in advance will increase your chances of having a safe and positive experience. If you are planning a hospital stay, your KnovaSolutions Specialist is available for support and to answer your questions.

### References & Resources

1. [A Painless Guide to Navigating Your Hospital Stay](#), by Sarah Baldauf. News & World Report: Health, April 30, 2010.
2. [10 Tips: Packing for a Hospital Stay](#), by Melissa Conrad Stoppler, MD, William C. Shiel, Jr, MD, FACP, FACR. MedicineNet, March 10, 2006.
3. [How to Prepare for a Hospital Stay](#). Helium, Inc., Health & Fitness, 2011.
4. [Adverse Drug Events Occurring Following Hospital Discharge](#), by Alan J. Forster MD, FRCPC, MSc et al. Journal of General Internal Medicine, Volume 20, Issue 4, pages 317-323, April 2005.
5. [Preparing for Surgery](#). Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons, March 2002.
6. [Preparing for Your Child's Hospital Stay](#). UCLA Mattel Children's Hospital.

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