

# How to Stay Out of the Hospital

**Most everyone would prefer to stay out of the hospital. Of course, sometimes it can't be helped, especially for someone with a chronic illness.** Your doctor may need to admit you to the hospital to get a specific treatment, like surgery. Or you may be admitted after going to the Emergency Room with an unexpected serious problem.

**Many hospitalizations may be avoided, however.** A person with a chronic illness may be able to learn how to deal with various problems and work with the doctor to get help outside of the hospital and prevent a crisis from occurring.

## How Can I Prevent Hospitalization?

Many hospitalizations can be avoided if patients were just careful to *follow their doctors' instructions*. These instructions may include how to take medications, what diet is best, and whether physical activity should be done.

### Some things to help:

- If you don't know *why* you are prescribed a medication, diet, or treatment, ask your doctor. Knowing and understanding the reason helps you understand the importance of following the plan the doctor has prescribed for you.
- Please tell your doctor if you cannot afford your medication. Most drug companies have "patient assistance programs" that may provide medications for little or no charge to you.
- If your pharmacy does not have the medication you are prescribed, call the doctor's office. The staff will find a pharmacy that has it, or will prescribe another "like" medication your pharmacy does have.

### Make and keep appointments

Most people with chronic illnesses see their physician at least every three months. Ask your doctor how often you should come for a check-up. Then make sure to go. If

for some reason you can't make an appointment at the scheduled time, call the office and reschedule.

### Don't ignore symptoms

If you experience any increased or troubling symptoms of your illness, call for an appointment to see your doctor. Don't wait too long to see if your symptoms will go away. Symptoms are your body's way of letting you know something is not right and needs attention.

### Try to stay active physically and mentally

Patients who have a chronic illness usually benefit from staying active. Talk to your doctor about how much physical activity is best for you. If you have difficulty walking, you may be able to stay active by moving your arms and legs while sitting. Try to stay socially active with friends and family, and when you're alone, read or do puzzles to keep your mind active.

### Remember that the Emergency Room is for emergencies

Hospital emergency rooms provide life-saving care. They have specialized staff and equipment ready to treat anyone with a sudden medical condition or injury that may be life-threatening or must have immediate care.

If you have a chronic condition that is getting worse, or you are experiencing a new symptom, it's best to see your own doctor. He or she knows you and is best able to evaluate you. If you go to the Emergency Room, you will see doctors and nurses who won't know anything about your history.

**Think ahead to avoid re-admission to the hospital**

If you *are* hospitalized and it is time to go home, a member of the hospital staff usually will sit with you to discuss what you need to do after leaving. Unfortunately, many patients experience difficulties after returning home, and within a month, come back to the hospital for the treatment of the same condition that was treated before. Many of these readmissions are avoidable.

If you have trouble understanding any of the information you are given at the time of discharge from the hospital, or there are problems that you expect might happen, it is important to speak up and discuss them before you leave.

- Ask questions about anything you don't understand.
- If possible, have a family member or close friend take part in the conversation with the doctor or nurse in the hospital and learn about your condition.
- If you are given written materials at the time of discharge, try to read them right away and ask questions if you have trouble understanding them.

- Make sure you understand how to take your medications.
- If you know that you will need help with basic tasks at home, ask if you can have a home health aide to help you with food shopping and cooking, bathing, dressing, and other activities.

**Things to remember after you're at home**

- Don't stop taking prescribed medication. This can lead to worsening of your condition that may go unnoticed and untreated.
- If you find out after you're home that a prescription for a medicine you received on leaving the hospital is too expensive, call your doctor and ask for a prescription for a less expensive version of the same type of medicine.
- If you have a strong or unusual side effect from medication, call your doctor's office immediately.
- Find out when your doctor would like to see you and make an appointment right away.

Be well and stay well!

**Patient Education Series****How to Stay Out of the Hospital*****When your symptoms are managed, you will:***

- Enjoy activities and have more energy
- Enjoy family and friends
- Feel less stress and anxiety
- Get better sleep at night
- Have a better quality of life

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