

## HOSPITAL QUICK GUIDE

The most important thing you can do to stay safe in the hospital is be actively involved in your care. Don't be afraid to ask questions and get clarification on things you don't understand. Keep careful notes so you can stay on top of everything.

Assign a support person to advocate for you while you're in the hospital. This can be a friend, family member or professional patient advocate. Ideally, you should have someone with you at all times—even at night if possible.

\*If you have Medicare, or are having surgery, see the special notes at the end of this guide.

### Call Your Insurance Company

Let your insurance company know you are being admitted to the hospital. Tell them about any planned surgeries, treatments or procedures. Ask if the hospital you are being admitted to, and the provider admitting you, are in-network.

### Ask About Out-of-Network Providers

Ask your doctor about the potential role of out-of-network providers in your care. Request in-network providers when possible. This can help you avoid 'surprise bills.'

When you sign the admission form asking you to accept financial responsibility for anything not covered by your insurance, write this: "I do not consent to out-of-network providers being involved in my care. I will not accept financial responsibility if out-of-network providers render care or consultation without my consent."

### Pre-Admission Testing

Ask if you will need to make an appointment for pre-admission testing before you are admitted.

### Your Health Summary

Make sure you bring a copy of your updated health summary and medication list. Give this to your nurse as soon as you arrive. Get your free printable template at [www.prudentpatient.com](http://www.prudentpatient.com)

### Bring These With You:

- Medical records, scans, x-rays, test results
- Updated health summary and med list
- Advance directives
- Small amount of cash (no valuables)
- Slippers with sticky soles, bathrobe
- Toiletries
- Books, magazines, MP3
- Earplugs and eye mask
- Eyeglasses and/or hearing aid
- Notepad and pen
- An advocate/support person

### Write Down Everything

There will be a lot of information to take in and you won't be able to remember everything. You, or your support person, should keep careful notes, jot down questions as they come to you and make a list of **everyone** involved in your care.

Also, keep track of test results, procedures, new medications or other therapies that you have.

### Check Your ID

Make sure the information on your ID bracelet is correct. Whenever you get medications, treatments, procedures, tests, lab work, or other interventions, a staff member should be checking your ID band. This helps prevent errors. If someone forgets to check your ID, give them a gentle reminder.

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### Track Your Progress

Ask your healthcare team, every day, how you're doing. Let them know if you have any concerns about your progress.

Get clarification on anything you don't understand. Write it all down!

### Speak Up

If you aren't feeling 'right' or have concerns about your progress, let your nurse know right away. Your support person can also alert your healthcare team if something isn't going well.

If you have issues with your care, or any other problems during your stay, ask to speak to the Nurse Manager. If you are unable to come to a resolution, you can contact the hospital's Patient Representative.

### Rapid Response Teams

Most hospitals have Rapid Response Teams (RRT; also called Medical Response Teams). This is a team of clinicians that can be called to your bedside if sudden, unexpected changes occur in your condition.

In some hospitals, patients and family members can activate this team.

Ask your nurse how the RRT system works in your hospital.

### Medication Safety

If you don't recognize a medication, always ask what it is, what it's for and who prescribed it. This includes pills, liquids, creams, injections, IVs, and breathing treatments. Also ask about potential risks side effects and compatibility with your other meds.

### Blood Draws

If you're getting blood drawn every day (often called 'daily labs') ask your healthcare team if this is necessary. Sometimes these tests are ordered out of habit and may not need to be done so often.

### Unexpected Therapies

If you are told you need an unexpected test, therapy or treatment, always ask why you need it, who prescribed it and the potential risks and side effects.

### Managing Your Pain

You may experience pain as a result of your condition or due to a surgery or procedure. Making sure your pain is under control can help you get better faster. Don't be afraid to tell someone if you're in pain.

Be aware that your pain may not be able to be completely eliminated. The goal is to bring it to a level you can tolerate.

You may have to take medications to help with pain. Also ask your nurse about alternative therapies such as massage, gentle exercise, heat/cold packs, and relaxation techniques.

### Preventing Pneumonia

Keeping the head of your bed elevated to 30 degrees, active coughing, deep breathing, incentive spirometry, daily movement and chest physiotherapy can all help prevent hospital-acquired pneumonia (HAP).

Ask your nurse what measures are being taken to prevent HAP.

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### Pressure Ulcers

Pressure ulcers (also called pressure damage or bedsores) are caused by skin and tissue damage due to constant pressure or friction. They can happen in anyone with reduced mobility. Pressure ulcers are painful, can be difficult to treat and may lead to serious complications.

Frequent positioning and movement, appropriate support surfaces, proper nutrition and excellent skin care can help prevent skin breakdown.

Pressure damage can happen within hours. Ask your nurse what measures are being taken to prevent you from getting pressure ulcers.

### Preventing Blood Clots

Hospitalization, itself, is a risk factor for developing dangerous blood clots. Being sick, infections, reduced mobility, surgery, medical devices and some medications can all contribute to excessive clotting.

Blood clots may be prevented with daily movement, compression stockings, sequential compression devices and medications called blood thinners (these are not appropriate for everyone, ask your provider).

Ask your nurse what measures are being taken to prevent you from getting blood clots.

### Preventing Falls

Falls are common in hospitals due to multiple causes and risk factors. They can cause serious complications and may prolong hospitalizations.

Keeping your bed low, using the call bell, wearing non-slip footwear, keeping walking areas clear and using assistive devices when needed can help prevent falls.

Ask your nurse what is being done to prevent you from falling.

### Preventing Infections

- Handwashing (or use of an alcohol-based hand sanitizer) is the **MOST EFFECTIVE** way to prevent spread of infection. Yet studies show that over 30% of healthcare workers fail to wash their hands before and after contact with patients. Don't be shy. Ask anyone that touches you if they have washed, or sanitized, their hands (including visitors).
- Any device that enters your body (such as catheters, IVs, chest tubes, drains, breathing tubes, etc.) has the potential to cause infection. Ask your team, daily, when it will be safe to remove invasive medical devices.
- Ask anyone who is sick not to visit you until they are well again.

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### C Diff

C Diff is a highly contagious infection of the colon. It can cause significant complications such as dehydration, 'toxic megacolon' and sepsis.

Some medications, like antibiotics and antacids, can increase your risk of developing C Diff.

If you do get C Diff, your healthcare team and visitors will need to wear a gown and gloves when they're with you.

Also-hand sanitizers are not effective against C Diff. Thus, handwashing with soap and water is very important to prevent spreading the infection.

### Restraints

Restraints can be physical or chemical (using certain medications). Some facilities have banned the use of physical restraints. In any case, restraints should be used as a last resort.

There are legal, ethical and safety issues regarding the use of restraints in healthcare.

Ask to see a copy of your hospital's policy on restraints. If your nurse is unable to provide one, ask to speak to the Nurse Manager or Patient Representative.

### Your Emotional Well-Being

Being in the hospital is very stressful and may cause you to feel sad, anxious or depressed. If you need extra help coping, tell your nurse right away. There are professionals available who can help you feel better.

Also ask if the hospital offers wellness programs such as massage, Reiki, art therapy, animal therapy, etc. These activities can be very calming and may even reduce pain.

### Your Support Person

It's very important to have someone with you while you're in the hospital to advocate for you (24/7 if possible) to advocate for you, ask questions, take notes and support you. This can be family, friends or a private patient advocate.

### Show Gratitude

Nurses, doctors, aides, therapists and other members of your healthcare team work hard to take care of you and help you feel better. You, or your family/friends can show them they're appreciated with kind words and simple 'thank-yous.'

It pays to be nice. Studies have found that patients with aggressive or rude behavior get worse care and are more likely to be misdiagnosed.

If you have an issue with anyone on your healthcare team, be sure to let the Nurse Manager or Patient Representative know.



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## Before You Leave:

- Fill out your Hospital Discharge Checklist available at [www.prudentpatient.com](http://www.prudentpatient.com)
- Ask for your discharge summary and instructions.
- Ask where you will go when you leave (home, nursing home, rehab, hospice). Tell your social worker or case manager which you prefer.
- Ask about problems to watch for and know who to call if you have questions.
- Write down all of your new medications and confirm which pharmacy will be filling your prescriptions. Review all of your prior medications and ask which ones you need to continue taking and if there are any you should stop.
- Ask if you will need any special medical equipment when you leave and who will arrange for it.
- Ask the billing department for an itemized bill. Get an explanation of the charges if something doesn't seem right.

## Special Note If You Have Medicare:

Ask your social worker, case manager or nurse if you're considered an 'observation' patient or if you have been 'admitted.' Medicare has a rule that it doesn't consider a hospital stay less than 3 days (or '2 midnights') as an admission. This could mean you'll have to pay more out-of-pocket. And your medications may not be covered while you're in the hospital.

Also, if you're considered an 'observation' patient, Medicare won't pay if you need to go to a nursing home after discharge.

Some patients are discharged just minutes before they meet criteria for admission. Talk to your providers while you're in the hospital. Ask to be admitted if your staying is approaching 72 hours (or '2 midnights').

## Special Note If You're Having Surgery:

If you're having surgery, be sure to mark the area on your body where the procedure will be performed. For example, if you're having surgery on your right lung stick a big piece of tape over that area and write on it: 'This is the correct side!' You can also put another piece of tape on the left side (wrong side) saying 'Wrong Side!'

Operating on the wrong area or side should never happen, but it does. This extra step may help prevent this type of error from happening to you.

Also-be sure to get your free Before Surgery and After Surgery Quick Guides on [prudentpatient.com](http://prudentpatient.com)