



28 Tips for Patients and Their Families for Safe Hospital Care

Barbara Levin BSN RN ONC CMSRN LNCC



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Keeping track

1. Keep a folder of your loved one's or your healthcare documents. Keep copies of your medical records, including test results.

Medications

2. Keep a list of all of your medications – why you are taking it, the dosage, the name of your physician, phone number, and the name of your pharmacy and its phone number. Include herbal medications and over the counter drugs.
3. Keep a list of your medications in your wallet.



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4. The surgeon will inform you of what medications you can and can't take on the morning of surgery, but also helps make recommendations as to how many days he wants you off some of your other medications. Some may tell you the day before; it depends on the medication. If the surgeon does not bring up the subject, ask.
5. Avoid bringing medications into the hospital. If the hospital does not have certain special medications, you will be informed. The physician may find a substitute for you or ask that a family member bring in your supply.
6. Be sure to let the surgeon know if you are taking any blood thinners like Coumadin or Lovenox. You may have heavy bleeding after surgery if these medications are not stopped.
7. Pay attention when the nurse is administering your medication. The nurse should be coming to your room with all the medication in their little individual packets and using two forms of identification to identify you- one

cannot be your room number. For example, the nurse may ask you your date of birth and your name. Listen to her as she's explaining what medications you're given. If you have questions about a medication or a name that does not sound familiar, don't hesitate to ask the nurse what that medication is for.

8. If you don't hear one of your normal medications in that list of medications, don't hesitate to inform the nurse, "I usually take this medication as well. Is the doctor aware? Perhaps he wants to put me back on it?" Or maybe there's a reason he doesn't want you on it. But definitely have a discussion with the nurse about that.
9. If you think you are about to get a medication you don't recognize, speak up. Ask the nurse to check to see if the new medication belongs to you.
10. Keep a list of all of your medications and when they are due. If you do not get a medication when it is due, ask where it is. Medication that has to be given at the time of change of nursing shift may get overlooked.
11. Be aware of any new symptoms you experience after receiving a medication. You may be having an allergic reaction. Report them to your nurse.

Being an advocate

12. Be active with your health care. Research certainly shows that those who are involved with their health care tend to have better results.



13. Bring a copy of your advanced directive or healthcare proxy document to the hospital. It's also most important if you or your loved one has a Do Not Resuscitate or Do Not Intubate preference so the wishes are continued. Bring that document also to the hospital.
14. If you are going into the hospital to have a surgery or perhaps you were admitted under urgent conditions and you need surgery, make sure you ask what type of surgery you are having and why. You should also ask how long will the surgery take and what will happen after the surgery. Also, you should ask from the physician, "What can I expect during the time of recovery?" and this will just give some guidance to you as you are planning to undergo this surgery.
15. Have a loved one visit you in the hospital to be a second set of ears because you need someone else to listen and advocate for you.
16. Know which doctor is in charge of your care. You may have numerous doctors but who's the one managing all of the care?
17. Make a list of questions. Physicians may do rounds at a very early time. Assemble all of your questions to ask at once because trying to get a physician later in the day can be a little bit challenging.
18. Shake the physician's hand, and say, "Hello, it's so nice to see you again, thank you for caring for me." Offering that handshake will engage the

physician as well.

19. If you have an urgent question, ask the nurse to contact the physician. Some hospitals use texting for pages so the nurse can text the question to the physician. If you really need to reach the physician and the nurse is not making any progress on your behalf, call the physician's office or ask the hospital operator to page the physician. This will likely get a very fast response.
20. Be sure to ask your questions. Healthcare providers come and go for their shift and it's the patient who is laying in the bed waiting and wondering. So if you did not get your question answered earlier, make sure you ask that question again; make sure you get the answers to your questions.

Practical aspects of being a patient

21. Initially avoid bringing your own clothes, whether they're new or old to avoid soiling them with blood or discharge.
22. Bring shoes with good traction for when you are allowed out of bed.



23. When you use your call light it's really important that you identify who you are and what your need is. Instead of saying "I need a nurse", explain to whomever is answering the call light what specifically you need and how urgent it is.
24. If you use the call light and don't receive a response within a short period of time, do not hesitate to contact the nurse again or call the front desk again because sometimes that nurse could be busy with another patient. Maybe she was never given the message. It's very important that you ring that call light again.

25. Find out when change of shift occurs and avoid asking for help during that time. This time may take as long as 30-45 minutes. Plan your needs, if possible, so you ask for help at a time when the nurses are not in change of shift report or making rounds. The nursing assistants will be on the unit during change of shift, but they are often busy with other tasks.
26. Do not get out of bed unassisted unless the nurse has already given you that approval. Even if you have to go to the bathroom, if you have not been out of bed before and you ring the call light and you don't see the nurse, absolutely do not get out of bed by yourself unattended. You may faint, fall and injure yourself.
27. If you are having a hard time with a roommate for whatever reason, communicate with the nurse. Explain the problem and ask if there's another room on the floor that perhaps you could be moved to another bed on that unit.
28. Be nice to the nurse and the nursing assistants because if you're going to be nice to them they'll respect you and be more willing to assist and may be do extra things for you if you have a good relationship.

Barbara Levin RN BSN ONC, CMSRN, LNCC is a staff nurse at a major city hospital, has a bachelors degree in nursing, is certified as an orthopaedic nurse, medical surgical nurse and as a legal nurse consultant. She testifies as an expert witness.