

6 things to do when you check out

More than a third of hospital patients fail to get needed follow-up care once they get home, according to the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. And many people have to be readmitted within 30 days of their discharge. To prevent that from happening to you, take these steps:



1 See a discharge planner. You or a friend or family member should try to do this at least a day before you leave so your family, your doctor, or the hospital can arrange for monitoring or services you'll need at home.

2 Decide if you're ready to go home. Hospitals and insurance companies have strong financial incentives to discharge you as soon as possible. And for most patients, the sooner you get home, the better. But you shouldn't go home if you feel disoriented, faint, or unsteady; have pain that's not controlled by oral medication; can't go to the bathroom unassisted; can't urinate or move your bowels; or can't keep food or drink down. If your doctor isn't able to extend your stay, appeal to the discharge planner or the hospital's patient advocate.

3 Get a discharge summary. Ask for a clear written statement of what you should do when you get home—for example, how to care for surgical wounds or a broken bone covered by a cast, and when you can shower, drive a car, return to work, and resume your normal diet.

4 Get a discharge list of medication. Ask about drugs you started in the hospital that you should continue when you get home, including their purpose and side effects, and if you should resume or eliminate drugs you were on before your admission. If you had anesthesia, ask what lingering side effects you might expect.

5 Get late test results. Make sure your doctor has any test results that were done while you were in the hospital, especially those in the 24 hours before you left. Consider asking for copies of the results so you can give them to your doctor. Also find out what follow-up blood or imaging tests you'll need after you leave.

6 Schedule an appointment with your doctor. It should be about a week or two after your hospital stay, though in some cases, such as to check the healing of surgical wounds, it might be sooner.

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