

How to Help Avoid Hospital Readmissions

Learn how to help prevent hospital readmissions and promote a healthy recovery for the person you're caring for.

Within 30 days of being discharged from a hospital, nearly one out of five older adults will be readmitted, according to the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. Still, hospital readmission is a potential risk at any age. While this is obviously stressful for the patient, readmissions also take a toll on caregivers. You have to once again navigate the details of hospital stays, insurance coverage and more. That's why it makes sense to do everything possible to avoid hospital readmissions. These tools to reduce hospital readmissions can help.

Pay close attention to instructions

At the end of your family member's or friend's hospital stay, make sure you completely understand all of the instructions provided by their medical team. If the person in your care is dealing with several health issues, there may be numerous physicians and nurses giving you instructions before you go. It's important to stay organized. Take notes or record their instructions using a voice recording or video function on your phone. Keep all paperwork in a folder or binder. If you're ever unclear, ask for more details.



Make follow-up appointments right away

If, for example, an appointment with a primary care physician is suggested within a week of discharge, call and schedule the appointment as soon as you can. According to the National Institutes of Health, prompt follow-up appointments for patients with conditions such as heart failure or COPD have been linked to lower rates of hospital readmission. It's important that the person you're caring for keeps his or her follow-up appointments so their medical team can continue to give them the best care possible.

HOW TO HELP AVOID HOSPITAL READMISSIONS

Administer medications with precision

Keeping track of new medications can be overwhelming, but you have to ensure the person you're caring for is taking their medication exactly as prescribed. If you have any questions about administering medication or you're worried about negative side effects, call the doctor or pharmacist immediately.

Be watchful

Are they showing changes in appetite? Complaining of pain? Appearing “out of it” or overly worried? Any changes in physical or mental health should be reported to their physician. Of course, always call **911** for anything that appears life-threatening.

Stay on top of therapy

Whether it's physical therapy, occupational therapy or speech therapy, be sure to get your friend or family member to whatever rehabilitation services have been recommended by his or her medical team.

Be persistent

It can be hard to keep someone on track of doctor-prescribed nutrition guidelines, physical activity suggestions, or other care treatments. But don't take “no” for an answer. The person you're caring for might not show appreciation for what you're doing, but try to cheer yourself on and stick with it. After all, thanks to your dedication and attention, your loved one has a much better chance of recovering and enjoying a healthy, hospital-free life.

Sources:

Healthcare cost and utilization project: Characteristics of 30-day all-cause hospital readmissions, 2010–2016

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National Institutes of Health: Effect of early follow-up after hospital discharge on outcomes in patients with heart failure or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease: A systematic review

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5466361/>

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