



Safe at Home: Managing Medications After Discharge

Managing medications after discharge

Have you experienced a hospital stay? If you're like most of us, you were looking forward to getting discharged, sleeping in your own bed, and leaving hospital food behind. And while you may be anxious to get out the door, some foresight and planning can keep you safe and in your home.

In medical terms, your discharge from the hospital to home (or to a rehabilitation center or other facility if you need additional care) is called a *transition of care*. These transitions often involve changes in the types of services you receive, new providers on your care team, or an adjustment to the level of care you need. During a transition, it's not uncommon to receive a lot of follow up instructions from different members of your care team. It can be confusing and put you at risk for readmission, which is defined as returning to the hospital within 30 days of discharge.



Understanding your medications is key to a smooth transition home

One of the most important parts of planning for discharge is understanding and managing your medications. Over the course of a hospital stay, medication regimens often change. Doses may be changed, new medications may be added, and some medications may be stopped altogether. Mistakes can happen, and they can be significant enough to land you back in the hospital.

The good news is that medication mistakes are preventable with some planning at the time of discharge. Here are tips to stay safe, optimize your health, and prevent a medication-related readmission to the hospital.

- **Communicate with your care team**

This includes primary care and specialist doctors, nurses, therapists and case managers. If something doesn't make sense, or if you're receiving conflicting information, speak up.

- **Understand costs and coverage**

Don't wait and risk an unpleasant surprise at the pharmacy. If you're prescribed new medications, find out how much they'll cost before you leave the hospital. If the cost is too high, ask about alternatives that will be more affordable.



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- **Get the help you need**

When you're discharged from the hospital, you're still in the recovery process. You may be managing pain, feeling tired, or experiencing mobility challenges. On top of all that, you have to manage your new medication regimen. Having a trusted friend or family member help you can ensure you take your medications correctly and prevent setbacks in your treatment. If you don't have a caregiver to help you, talk to your case manager about other resources, such as visits by a home health nurse.

- **Talk to your pharmacist**

Your pharmacist is an important part of your care team and can be a valuable resource in helping you overcome barriers to taking your medications. They can answer questions you have about your medications, help with managing side effects, arrange deliveries if you can't get to the pharmacy, and work with your doctor to find alternative medications if cost is an issue. If your daily regimen is overwhelming (for example, taking multiple medications at different times of day), your pharmacist may be able to work with you and your doctor to make it easier.

Steps for a Successful First 48 Hours

1. The Pharmacy Bridge

Don't assume your prescriptions are ready and waiting. Before the hospital transport arrives, ask: *Have these orders been sent to my local pharmacy?* and *Do I have enough doses in hand to last until tomorrow afternoon?* If you are being discharged on a Friday or a weekend, ask for a 2-day "bridge supply" to carry you through in case your local pharmacy doesn't open until Monday.

2. Get Organized

Once you are home, clear a space on a counter or table specifically for your medications. Keep your discharge papers and your new medication list on the kitchen counter or refrigerator where they are easy for you and your family to find. Use a multi-day pill organizer to sort your doses for the week and take the guesswork out of your morning and evening routines.

3. Know the Red Flags

Keep a close eye on how you feel during the first few days after discharge. While some mild tiredness is normal after a hospital stay, you should call your doctor immediately if you experience:

- Sudden dizziness or lightheadedness when standing up
- A new skin rash or hives
- Severe upset stomach or diarrhea
- Confusion or "brain fog" that wasn't there before

Recovery is your full-time job right now. Don't be afraid to ask questions until you feel 100% confident in your plan.