

A PATIENT'S GUIDE TO A HOSPITAL STAY

Introduction

If your doctor decides you need medical treatment that will require a stay in a hospital, this guide provides information and questions to help you prepare.

Before going into the hospital, ask your doctor to explain your condition and the treatment you will receive. Ask if there are other choices of treatment available. You can also request a second opinion from another doctor, or you may be referred to a specialist.

Ask the doctor for written material about your condition and treatment that can help you know what to expect and how best to help in your healing. You might also find information on the Internet.

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Before You Go into the Hospital

- Visit [FloridaHealthFinder.gov](#) to find information on your medical condition or procedure. You can use the [Health Encyclopedia](#) as well as the [hospital comparison tool](#) described later.
- When you meet with the doctor, if possible take a friend or loved one with you. They can help you ask questions and take notes, if necessary.
- If there is more than one hospital you can choose from, talk with your doctor about this choice. You can also view the [hospital comparison tool](#) on [FloridaHealthFinder.gov](#) to compare hospitals on health outcomes and performance.
- Ask your insurance company if they will pay for the treatment, if they cover this doctor, and if you need approval from them before going into the hospital. Ask which hospitals are covered by your insurance. If they do not approve coverage, ask how you can appeal the decision.

- Ask your insurance company about coverage limits and if there is a deductible and/or co-payment. If you are covered by a health plan, you might like to review your plan for member satisfaction and quality measures. These can be found through the [health plan comparison tool](#) on [FloridaHealthFinder.gov](#).
- Be sure to give the doctor a complete medical history, including medical conditions, past surgeries, and allergies. Provide a full list of the medications you take (prescription, over-the-counter, vitamins, and herbal supplements), including the names and dosages. You can either make a list or bring the medicine containers with you.
- An anesthesiologist is the person who will give you medication in order to block pain and/or put you to sleep during the procedure or surgery. Be sure this person has your medical history, including any allergies, your medications, and if you have had reactions to medicines.
- If you have a health care advance directive, make sure your doctor and the hospital have a copy. An advance directive states how you want medical decisions made should you not be able to make them yourself.

Hospitals are required to ask if you have an advance directive or to provide you with an advance directive form, should you wish to complete one. More information can be found in the pamphlet [Health Care Advance Directives](#) on [FloridaHealthFinder.gov](#).

- Plan for your hospital stay and recovery before you go into the hospital by arranging for childcare, pets, plants, transportation home, and, if needed, home health care or rehabilitation. (Your doctor or the hospital staff may help you arrange home health care or rehabilitation.)
- Following are personal items you may want to bring with you to the hospital: toiletries (hairbrush, toothbrush and toothpaste, deodorant, etc.); a robe, nightgown and slippers; reading material; TV listings; and other things to occupy your time. Some of these items may be provided by the hospital, but are often costly and may not be paid for by your health insurance.
- Do not take jewelry, cash, or other valuables.

Questions You May Want to Ask the Doctor

About the Procedure/Surgery

- Why do I need the procedure/surgery and what are the risks?
- Are there alternative treatments?

- Will you or someone else perform the procedure/surgery? If it's someone else, ask to meet with that person.
- What is your experience with this procedure/surgery?
- When will I meet with the anesthesiologist?

About the Hospital Stay

- Is there preparation I need to do before coming to the hospital?
- Do I need to stop or change any of my medications before this procedure/surgery?
- What can I expect once I arrive at the hospital?
- How long will the procedure/surgery take?
- How long do you think I will be in the hospital?

About Recovery

- Will I have any restrictions on walking, eating, drinking, bathing, lifting, etc., while in the hospital or once I return home?
- What signs or symptoms should I watch for that might show I am not healing well, am having a poor reaction, or developing an infection?
- Will I need home health care, special medical equipment or rehabilitation when I leave the hospital? Will you or hospital staff help me arrange for this care?
- Will there be any changes in my medications after this procedure/surgery?
- How do I take care of my incision?
- How soon can I drive, exercise, resume sexual activity, return to work, etc?

Consumer Tips

- If you need more time to think about your choices, talk with your doctor about your concerns. You can also ask for a second opinion from another doctor. Ask if your health insurance will cover a second opinion.
- If you do not understand something when talking with your doctor or the hospital staff, ask that it be more clearly explained to you.

- You may be able to save money or a hospital day by having routine tests before going into the hospital. Discuss this with your doctor.
- If you prefer privacy, you might want to compare the cost of private and semi-private rooms and ask your insurance company how much they would pay for the room. If you want a private room you can pay the additional charge above what your insurance company will pay.
- If possible have a friend or loved one at the hospital and ask the doctor to speak with them after your procedure/surgery. If someone is unable to be with you at the hospital, provide the names and telephone numbers of people to contact in case of a medical emergency or a change in your condition. Due to federal law, hospitals and medical staff are not allowed to share medical information unless you give them permission to do so.
- Make sure your hospital wristband has your correct information.
- Before you are given medication or other treatments, ask that the order be checked to make sure it is the correct medication or treatment.
- Be aware of the medicines you are given, what they are for, and what side effects they may cause. If you think they are late giving you medicine or you think they have missed a dose, speak with the nurse.
- Find out when your doctor plans to visit so you will not be asleep or if you want to have a loved one with you during the visit.
- Have paper and pen to write down questions for your doctor or nurse. You or a loved one can also take notes on information given to you.
- If you are in pain, speak with your doctor or nurse to see if your pain medication can be adjusted.
- If your condition changes and you begin to feel worse or have symptoms that concern you, speak with your doctor or nurse.

A Child's Hospital Stay

Being in a hospital can be frightening for children since they may not know what to expect and may not be able to easily express their concerns. The more a child and the parents can learn will help the child be better prepared.

Before the Hospital Stay

- View the [hospital comparison tool](#) on FloridaHealthFinder.gov for information specific to children.

- Have the doctor describe the procedure or surgery to your child, in an age appropriate way, describing what your child can expect during the hospital stay. You may want to meet separately with the doctor to get more details.
- Ask your child if he or she has any questions or concerns. Give a truthful and clear response to each concern, providing information appropriate for the child's age. Reassure your child you will be there to give help and comfort.
- If possible, take your child for a visit to the hospital before they are admitted, as this can make them feel more familiar and comfortable.
- Have your child choose a favorite book, game, stuffed animal, blanket, and similar items which will give comfort and entertain them. Ask them to help pack a suitcase for their stay, so they are a part of the preparation.
- Inform your child's school of his or her upcoming absence and, if appropriate, ask how your child can keep up with school work, arranging for assignments and books.

Questions for the Doctor

- Is this procedure/surgery commonly performed on children?
- How have other children reacted to this procedure/surgery?
- If my child is going to be taking medicine, is it commonly given to children?
- Is there a Child Specialist on staff to help prepare my child for the visit?
- Can I stay overnight in my child's room?
- Is there a children's area or a program to provide arts and crafts, children's videos, or other types of activities?
- When can my child return to school and to normal activities?

Helpful Tips for Kids & Parents

- Have a family member or friend with your child as much as possible. If you need to leave, show your child how to operate the nurse call button and let the staff know the child will be alone.

Explain to your child where you are going, what time you will return, and reassure them the hospital staff is ready to help them. If possible, write down your cell phone number and the phone numbers of other loved ones. Place the phone where it's easy to reach, along with a game, book, and/or television remote.

- Introduce hospital staff to your child when they enter the room and ask the staff to explain what they are doing.
- Encourage your child to talk about their experiences and feelings. Let them know it is okay to be afraid, to cry, and to ask questions.
- Assure your child that the visit to the hospital does not mean he or she has done something wrong. Remind them why they are there and what is going to happen.
- Remind your child to tell you, the nurse or doctor if something hurts or if they start to feel worse. Watch your child for changes in mood, behavior, temperature, upset stomach, and other things that might show they are not healing well, are having a poor reaction, or are developing an infection.
- Allow your child to make decisions (about food, TV programs, what to play or read). This will help them feel some control in an unfamiliar situation.
- Your child may begin acting younger than his or her age, by clinging or whining, wetting the bed, sucking their thumb, wanting to sleep with the light on. These can be normal reactions to the stress and change of being in a hospital. Such behaviors will likely begin to disappear when your child returns home to a more normal routine. However, if such behavior continues for a long period of time, you may want to talk with your child's doctor.

FloridaHealthFinder.gov – Information at Your Fingertips

The Agency for Health Care Administration created the FloridaHealthFinder.gov website to provide comparison tools and information to help the public become better informed health care consumers and to assist researchers in the study of Florida's health care trends. The website includes a Multimedia Health Encyclopedia, a Symptom Navigator, a hospital and ambulatory surgery comparison tool, and other comparison tools.

Facility Locator

You can find a list of hospitals (as well as other types of health care facilities and providers) through the [Facility/Provider Locator](#). The facility profile page provides the address, phone number, driving directions, owner, chief executive officer, number and types of beds, the hospital's website (if available), emergency and legal actions (if applicable), and links to inspection reports and the hospital comparison tool.

If you are looking for particular types of hospital beds, particular programs or special services, organ transplant programs, trauma centers, or other types of search options, you can choose these on the Facility Locator homepage, under the Advance Search option.

Multimedia Health Encyclopedia

Prior to your stay in a hospital you can find information on your medical condition or procedure through the [Multimedia Health Encyclopedia](#). The encyclopedia provides information on particular diseases and medical conditions, symptoms, tests, and preparation for surgery or a procedure. The encyclopedia includes over 3,900 articles; 3,000 illustrations, diagrams and photos; and over 80 videos.

The articles address causes and risks for a condition or procedure, symptoms, tests and treatments, when to call your doctor, prevention, and more. Some of the articles include links to Florida health care data, as well as links to Care Points with more in-depth information about medical care. The patient health care videos cover common health topics such as tracking your blood pressure at home, the difference between a cold and the flu, and how to use an asthma inhaler.

There are also Care Points which feature over 300 topics covering the most common health issues like gallbladder removal, spine surgery, cancer, heart failure, and more. Care Points can help patients become more active participants in their care. It includes four clinical areas: information and instructions prior to an operation, after discharge, self-care information, and suggested questions to ask your doctor.

Symptom Navigator

A quick way to view articles in the encyclopedia is through the [Symptom Navigator](#). The navigator allows the user to click on a human form related to a particular symptom, like lower back pain or knee or elbow problems. It then provides a variety of links that open up articles in the Health Encyclopedia related to the symptom.

Compare Hospitals and Ambulatory Surgery Centers

One of the highlights of [FloridaHealthFinder.gov](#) is the [hospital and ambulatory surgery center comparison tool](#) which presents data on over 150 medical conditions and procedures. It allows consumers to compare hospitals for quality of care and patient satisfaction. The data comes directly from Florida hospitals and allows consumers to look at the number of hospitalizations for particular medical conditions and procedures; range of charges; as well as rates for infections and complications, mortality, and readmissions. Information is also provided on various conditions and procedures specific to the pediatric population, which provides parents with a valuable resource when preparing for a child's hospital stay. For Florida ambulatory surgery centers the data includes the number of visits and range of charges.

Physician Volume

This feature on the website looks at [physician volume](#) for five procedures performed by doctors in Florida hospitals. The procedures include total hip and total knee replacement, angioplasty, spinal fusion and coronary artery bypass graft. This will help you compare the experience surgeons have with these particular surgeries. Additional procedures that look at physician volume will be added in the future.

Other Comparison Tools

Additional comparison tools on FloridaHealthFinder.gov look at [assisted living facilities](#), [nursing homes](#), [health plans](#), [home health agencies](#) and [prescription drug prices](#). This website provides retail pricing information for 150 of the most commonly prescribed drugs in Florida along with their available generic brands. The prices reflect what an uninsured consumer with no discount or supplemental plan would normally pay for a prescription.

Patient's Bill of Rights and Responsibilities

Click [here](#) to view a summary of the Patient's Bill of Rights and Responsibilities set by Florida statute.

If You Have a Complaint

If you are not satisfied with the service you are receiving while in the hospital speak with your doctor, the director of nursing, the patient advocate, or ask the staff who you can talk to about your concern.

If you think the hospital may have violated the law relating to your care, you can file a complaint with the Agency for Health Care Administration, while you are in the hospital or after your discharge. To file a complaint, call the toll-free number (888) 419-3456 or file it [online](#). To file a complaint against health care providers licensed by any state agency, including AHCA, you may utilize the [Florida Health Care Complaint Portal](#).

To file a complaint against a doctor, or other health care professional, call the Department of Health's toll-free number (877) 425-8852 or visit <http://www.floridahealth.gov>.

Additional Consumer Guides Include:

[Assisted Living in Florida](#)

[End-of-Life Issues – A Practical Planning Guide](#)

[Health and Human Services Programs](#)

[Health Care Advance Directives](#)

[Home Health Care in Florida](#)

[Long-Term Care](#)

[Nursing Home Care in Florida](#)

[Patient Safety](#)

[Understanding Prescription Drug Costs](#)

Note: This is not designed to offer medical or legal advice. Please talk with your doctor for medical advice and an attorney for legal advice.

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If you have comments or suggestions, call (850) 412-3750.