

NICHE

NURSES IMPROVING CARE FOR HEALTHSYSTEM ELDERS

Need to Know for Patients and Families

*What patients
and their
families need to
know before
hospitalization
or a nursing
home admission*



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Managing Medications

Why Is It Important? Your healthcare provider is your partner in learning about your medications and how to manage them. Medications should be taken as prescribed. Medications may affect you differently as you get older and/or develop more health conditions. Medications may cause side effects such as depression, delirium (acute change in mental status), shortness of breath, dizziness, and/or falls. Dosages or frequency of taking medications may need to change over time. Remember, medications include those prescribed by a health care provider, over-the-counter medications, vitamins, supplements, laxatives, and herbal remedies.

What You Can Do:

1. Ask your health care provider about the medications you are currently taking including the purpose of each. Ask about the benefits and side effects.
2. Talk to your medical provider or nurse immediately if side effects occur.
3. Ask your health care provider about any new medications given to you in the hospital.
4. If recently discharged from a hospital or nursing home, ask your health care provider to review all medications from before and after your stay.
5. Ask how new medications may interact with your existing medications.
6. Include a family member or caregiver in conversations about your medications.
7. Ask your health care provider if any of your medications are on the Beers Criteria list. This is a list of medications that are potentially inappropriate for use in older adults.
8. Write information or instructions in a journal.

What else you or a caregiver can do:

1. Ask for a written schedule of:
 - Name of medication • Purpose
 - Times to take • Possible side effects
2. Use one pharmacy that is close to home for all of prescriptions. Review medications with a pharmacist if you have any questions.
3. If you are not able to pick up your medications, ask to have them delivered or have someone pick them up for you.
4. Use pill organizers, calendars and alarms to help you manage your medications.
5. Read the label and follow directions. If you have questions call your medical provider or pharmacy.
6. Do not take more or less of a medication than is prescribed, or stop them before indicated.
7. Know which drugs work better with foods, and which work better without food.
8. Call your medical provider immediately if side effects occur.

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Going and Coming Home: The NICHE Need to Know Hospital Checklist

Things you should bring to the hospital or have available at all times

- Your medication list
- The names and phone numbers of all of your doctors and what their specialties are
- Your medical history (surgeries, procedures, etc. and dates)
- Your family phone numbers — home and cell
- Allergies or adverse reactions to medication, food or your environment
- Your Power of Attorney and/or Living Will papers
- Your insurance cards or information
- Your pharmacy phone number

If you are staying in the hospital, you may want to have your family bring in the following:

- If you didn't already, your Power of Attorney and/or Living Will papers
- Insurance cards, Medicaid card and/or Medicare card
- Your glasses and/or hearing aids if you did not bring them
- Assistive devices such as a walker or cane
- Dentures if you didn't bring them
- Toothbrush and toothpaste
- Comb or brush
- Notebook and pen
- Other items you feel would make you more comfortable (robe, slippers, etc.)
- Soothing entertainment items such as music, radio, books, magazines or puzzle books
- Favorite blanket
- When bringing personal items like a blanket, music, etc. be sure to clearly label belongings with your name and phone number.
- For family/caregivers: If your loved one is cognitively impaired, provide personal information (hobbies, interests, occupation, etc.) about the patient that can help the staff "connect." See NICHE Need to Know Dementia Series.

When you are going home from the hospital, make sure you know:

- Written directions on what you should do when you get home
- How to do any medical tasks you will need (such as changing bandages)
- Any changes that may be needed in the environment at home (e.g., bathroom safety)
- The timeline of your recovery
- Any new medications or prescriptions to be filled
- Any needed equipment or supplies
- Date when you need to see your doctor and/or specialist
- Which procedures and tests were done during the hospital stay and that results were sent to your doctor or specialist
- The call-back number and name of the unit or hospital if you have any questions
- The phone number of a Home Health Agency if you feel you need more assistance at home.

Make sure medications listed on your discharge summary match those you have at home. If different, make sure you understand why. Follow up with your health care provider if you have any questions about your medication list. Properly dispose of any medications discontinued during a hospital or nursing home stay.