

Hospital stay guide



Helping you plan for a stay in hospital and coming home

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A stay in hospital can be a worrying time. You might have concerns about how you'll cope while you're away from home or how you'll manage when you return. However, the concerns many older people have, as well as those of their family and carers, can be reduced by planning your visit ahead of time.

This guide provides some general advice for planning your hospital stay and your recovery. If you have specific questions or concerns you should raise these with your GP, nurses or other health professionals. It is important that you let other people know how you're feeling so you can get the support you need.

If you have a planned hospital admission there are some practical things you can do to prepare for your stay. You can ask family members, friends or health professionals to help with this.

Making sure that the practicalities are looked after means less fretting whilst you're in hospital.

If you are admitted to hospital in an emergency - after a fall for example - you can use basic equipment provided by the hospital until you can arrange for someone to bring you your things from home. Hospital staff should be able to help you arrange this.

Going into hospital checklist

- 1** If you have any caring responsibilities, find someone to take these on for you.
- 2** If you get help from social services, tell them you are going into hospital.
- 3** Your State Pension should continue to be paid while you are in hospital but any benefits you receive may be affected. For more information, go to [direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/HealthAndSupport/Hospitals/DG_4000474](https://www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/HealthAndSupport/Hospitals/DG_4000474)
- 4** Make sure your home is secure. You might need to ask someone to look after your pet, water your plants or collect your mail. Alternatively, Royal Mail's Keepsafe service will look after your post for up to two months. For more information, go to [royalmail.com/delivery/inbound-mail/keepsafe](https://www.royalmail.com/delivery/inbound-mail/keepsafe)
- 5** Make a list of things you want to take into hospital and get help shopping for any extras you'll need.
- 6** Write down any questions you may have so you can discuss them with staff when you get into hospital.
- 7** Unplug your electrical appliances and turn your heating down before you leave home.

Meet Susie, from Manchester

Susie is from Salford in Manchester. Her husband Launne noticed that despite going to the gym three times a week and working hard at her slimming club, she wasn't losing any weight and Susie agreed that her stomach was quite swollen. After being diagnosed with bowel cancer by her health consultant, Susie went into hospital and had surgery.

Susie's top tips for a hospital stay:

- Get as much information as you can before you go into hospital. My nurse gave me a DVD to watch so I was prepared for what was going to happen.
- Pack a bag of all the things you'll need and a few extra things that will make your stay more comfortable. My friend put little extras in my bag like hand cream and a cooling spray for my face. They really made a difference to me.
- Try to find a friend or neighbour who you can call on if you need anything. Launne was fantastic while I was in hospital. I knew my stomach was going to be swollen and he found me some lovely elasticated trousers, which made me feel a lot better.
- You can feel quite secure in hospital and many people will be worried about going home. I was anxious about leaving. Ask about leaflets, people you can call and support groups you can join so you have ongoing help when you leave hospital.
- Try to keep your sense of humour. My friend brought me a little fancy bag fob from a well known bag company to hang off my colostomy bag. She said 'no friend of mine is going out without a designer bag!'. Being able to laugh about the situation really helps.



While you're in hospital

Support

WRVS provides befriending and support in many hospitals around the country. You can find out more about this service from your nurses. If you want spiritual support ask your care staff about what is available.

Communication

If you have any questions or are unclear about anything, it is important that you ask for more information. You may want a relative or carer to be present during your consultations or you may find it easier to ask for a summary of your conversations with care staff to be provided in writing. If English is not your first language you can ask for an interpreter to be present.

Eating and drinking

It is very important that you eat and drink well before you go into hospital, while you are in hospital and once you have left. It means you are more likely to recover quickly. If you have a special diet or need some help eating or drinking, tell hospital staff as soon as you arrive.

Your care

If you are concerned about the way you are being treated, speak to the nurse in charge of your ward. If you still have concerns the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) is a confidential hospital-based service where you can talk about any issues. Visit them online at pals.nhs.uk. There should be information about the PALS service on your ward. If you can't see it, ask a member of staff.

Returning home checklist

- 1** Get a relative or carer to help you leave hospital and settle in at home. Ask about **WRVS** support.
- 2** Make sure you understand what medicines you need to take, and when.
- 3** Ensure you know how to use any equipment you will need to take home with you.
- 4** Feel free to ask a doctor or nurse to write down anything that you will need to remember.
- 5** Make sure you know who to contact if you need more help.



Leaving hospital

Leaving hospital can cause some anxiety, especially if you are concerned about managing on your own. You may feel more confident if you know that you have personal and practical plans in place and help at hand. **WRVS** volunteers can provide support for you on leaving hospital and for your first few days or weeks, to help you get back on your feet.

Before you leave hospital your care staff will carry out an assessment that will summarise your needs so that the right level of support can be put in place. You will also receive a written discharge plan, which should be explained to you before you leave hospital. Your GP should also receive a copy.

Hospital staff should include you in decisions about your care and the support you will receive once you have left hospital. Feel free to raise any concerns you have. You may choose to have a friend, relative or carer present so that they can help you plan.

If you are returning home you may need to make some changes to your property so that you can live there safely after your hospital treatment.

If you can't manage at home you might need to make some different arrangements such as temporary respite or convalescent care until you are back on your feet or, if necessary, permanent residential care.

“ Meet Leonard, 84...”

I suffered a serious fall after an operation and this resulted in four weeks in hospital, followed by five and a half weeks in re-habilitation after which I was discharged and taken home. On arrival home I found a succession of messages from Claire, the WRVS organiser offering help and advice. In the following six weeks, I was given regular help... collecting me from home to attend doctor's surgery health centre for drugs and treatment and taking me to the next village for essential groceries... my WRVS volunteer was superb organising every move and developing my confidence.

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Your recovery

The first few weeks are really important for your recovery. It may take some time and as well as the physical side of things, you may find that you need support to regain your confidence after a stay in hospital.

You might need help from health professionals so talk to your family, doctor and health visitors about how you are feeling and what kind of support you would like. If you find that you need more help to manage at home, or changes making to your accommodation, contact your GP or your local social services team.



How WRVS can help

WRVS is Britain's largest charity working with older people. Its **40,000** volunteers help older people get more out of life, by helping them live independently at home and get involved in their communities.

We are there every step of the way, providing simple, practical and neighbourly support before, during and after a stay in hospital.

Our volunteers also provide befriending services so you have someone to talk to and they run shops and cafés in hospitals across England, Scotland and Wales, which provide a welcoming place to take a break.

To find out more about **WRVS** in your area and how we can help you, go to wrvs.org.uk or call **0845 601 5964**



Useful contacts

England - NHS Direct

The phone line and website provides information on medical conditions and contact details for support groups, local GPs and PALS

0845 4647 nhsdirect.nhs.uk

Scotland - NHS 24

24 hour health advice and information service for people in Scotland

08454 24 24 24 nhs24.com

Wales - NHS Direct Wales

Galw lechyd Cymru

NHS Direct Wales (Galw lechyd Cymru) is the NHS Direct service for people in Wales. It provides information in English and Welsh

0845 4647 nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk

NHS Choices

Includes a symptom checker and a list of frequently asked questions and useful contacts

nhschoices.nhs.uk

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS provides information, advice and support to people using the health services in England. It can also put you in contact with your local Independent Complaints Advocacy Service (ICAS)

0845 4647 pals.nhs.uk

About this guide

This guide has been developed with the older people **WRVS** works with and using best practice from the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE). It contains general information for planning your time in hospital and we hope that older people and their carers and families will find it useful.

If you have found this guide helpful, you might be interested in reading other WRVS guides like 'Feeling well and overcoming loneliness', which can be found online at wrvs.org.uk

If you need this, or any other guide in a different format please email enquiries@wrvs.org.uk or call **0845 600 5885**

Can you help WRVS?

If you can spare a few hours every week or fortnight and would like to help older people in your area, please contact us on **0845 601 4670** to find out more about volunteering for WRVS.

As a charity, WRVS relies on donations so it can continue to make a difference to older people's lives.

If you would like to make a donation, please go to wrvs.org.uk/donate or call **0845 607 6524**

Thank you for any help you can give.

Please exercise your common sense when considering this guide and whether to take any of the steps that may be suggested in it. Whilst we have taken reasonable care to ensure that any factual information is accurate and complete, most of the information in this guide is based on our views and opinions (and sometimes the views and opinions of the people or organisations we work with). As a result, we cannot make any promises about the accuracy or the completeness of the information and we don't accept any responsibility for the results of your reliance on it.