



Piedmont's Sixty Plus Helpline

404.605.3867

For persons in the Mountainside area,
please use 706.299.5059 for toll free calls

Sixty Plus Services

piedmont.org/sixtyplus

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Hospital Visits for Those with *Memory Loss*

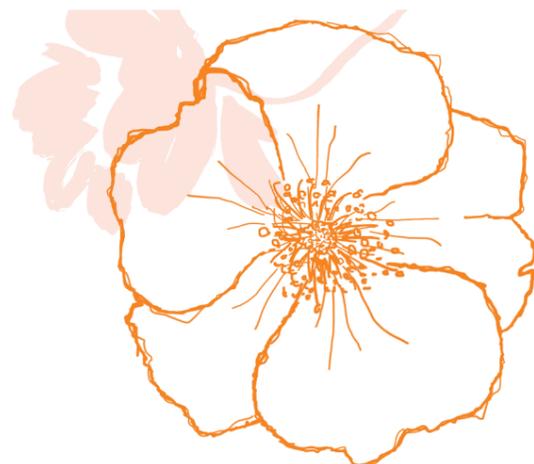
Planning Ahead – Tips for Friends
and Family Members



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HEALTHCARE *Real change lives here*

A trip to the hospital is hard for anyone, but more so for those with memory loss/dementia. This brochure can help reduce your stress by helping you plan ahead. Here are tips on how to support you, comfort your loved one and work closely with the hospital staff.



Be prepared.

It is likely a time will come when a trip to the hospital or emergency room will be necessary.

Creating a bag in preparation for a planned or unplanned hospital visit can reduce stress and anxiety. Consider having the following ready in a "go bag".

- Insurance cards (or copy)
- A list of all physician names and numbers.
- A list of phone numbers of key family members, clergy, helpful friends, etc.
- A list of current medications, doses and the physician who prescribed.
- A list of all allergies to medicines and food. Also list medicines that have caused problems.
- Copies of health care advance directives (Advance Directive for healthcare, POLST, DNR).
- A change of clothes for both you and your loved one.
- Extra adult briefs or Depends, disposable wipes and gloves if used at home.
- Paper and pen to write down information and directions. You may want to write down the symptoms to show to the doctors and nurses.

In preparation for a visit to the emergency room

- Be able to report what was occurring just prior to the emergency event.
- Triage is where they identify and rank the seriousness of patients as they arrive. The ED is not first come, first served.
- Be prepared to wait, both in the waiting room and in the exam room for tests to be run and for doctors to call back.
- Emergency Rooms can be noisy and frightening. Your calm and confident presentation will help calm your loved one; offer physical comfort and reassurance as well.

Have pen and paper to take notes about different providers who visit and the information they share; this is especially helpful if caregivers alternate staying with the patient.

- A sealed snack such as crackers and a bottle of water or juice for you and the patient. Snacks can serve as a comforting distraction if your loved one is anxious. Please speak with hospital staff before giving your loved one the snack, as they may not be able to eat due to testing or other reasons.
- A card or note to show the staff that says "My family member has memory issues. Let me help with specific questions." Avoid talking about their memory changes or problem behaviors in front of the patient. It can be upsetting and embarrassing for some.
- A reassuring object for the patient such as a picture, stuffed animal, favorite blanket, or a pillow.
- Ensure your phone or any electronic devices are fully charged to stay connected and informed.

- Help the staff understand your person's condition.
- Many medical conditions are treated followed by a release back home. Do not be surprised if your loved one is not admitted to the hospital.
- Before leaving the Emergency Room, ask for details about the follow-up plan. Most instructions include seeing the primary physician within a short period of time. Even if you feel the problem has been resolved, notify the Primary Care Provider of the emergency department visit.

In preparation for a planned hospital visit

- Do not talk about the hospital stay in front of the person as if they are not there.
- As much as possible, let them take part in planning the stay.
- Plan ahead: Make a schedule of family and friends who can take turns sitting with the patient during the entire hospital stay.

While in the hospital

- Make sure someone stays with your loved one at all times. This will keep your loved one calmer, less confused, and aid the medical staff when they ask questions. It will also help to keep your loved one safer, as you can make sure they do not remove intravenous medications or get out of bed, and you may be able to assist them with using the bathroom, etc.
- Comfort the person. Stay calm and positive, your loved one may absorb any distress you are feeling.
- Answer the medical staff's questions outside of the patient's room when possible. Ask the staff to limit direct questions to the patient if he/she is struggling to answer.
- Ask the staff to avoid physical restraints if they are not absolutely necessary.
- Open food containers and remove trays and non-food items such as trash from disposable cutlery to limit distractions on the table. Help order meals.
- Offer and remind the patient to drink fluids.
- The strange surroundings and medical attention can potentially stress your loved one resulting in a need for more help with personal care than is ordinarily required at home. This is a sudden temporary confusion that usually resolves with time. But the increased confusion and need for more assistance may last until well after discharge. The patient may require additional help when they go home to assure safety.

Preparation for the caregiver

- Identify those in your circle you can count on. Consider at least two dependable family members, neighbors or friends known to the patient that you can call when a trip to the hospital is required. They can go with you or meet you there so that one person can take care of the paperwork and answering questions while the other stays with your loved one.
- Pack a bag for yourself to include over the counter pain medication, toiletries, a change of clothes, pillow, blanket, cell phone and charger, earphones, and electronic devices you often use such as a laptop or e-reader.
- Engage family or friends in helping to communicate progress of your loved one to others. Consider group texts, phone chains, or emails to minimize the number of communications you must manage.

- Just before leaving home, find a way to say that the two of you are going to spend a short time in the hospital. Keep the conversation simple, avoiding long explanations.
- Pack comfort items that will help your loved one feel safe and secure: favorite clothes, blanket, photos, recorded music, etc.

- Hospital delirium, a state of extreme confusion and disorientation, worse than normal, can occur in response to a hospitalization. Some of the causes include fever, infection, medication side effects, dehydration, sleep cycle disturbances, and overstimulation from sounds and frequent staff at the bedside.
- Assume the patient will have problems finding the bathroom, using the call light, and sleeping soundly at night. Assist them, as they allow, with these tasks.
- Decide with the staff who will do what for the patient. You may want to be the one to help with bathing, eating, or using the toilet. If you are physically unable to do these things, ask your loved one if you should stay in the room during these times.
- Watch for non-verbal signs of discomfort (grimacing, clenched fists, moaning, furrowed brow) and be prepared to communicate those with staff.
- With a diagnosis of dementia, you may question whether continued hospitalization and aggressive care are the best choice for your loved one. You can ask for a consultation with the Palliative care team. Palliative care is a specialized form of care intended to relieve symptoms and improve overall quality of life. Palliative care providers can help you consider goals of care.

- If you are the sole caregiver at the hospital, try to schedule someone to give you meal breaks.

Keep these tips in mind, and you'll be ready for your time at the Emergency room or hospital. Your loved one's health is the most important thing, and being prepared can make everything a bit easier. If you ever have questions or need help our team is here for you.

