

Getting a Post-Discharge Appointment in 7 Days

Your wife is about to be discharged from the hospital. She is coming home. You have a lot to do and worry about. This includes arranging a ride from the hospital, getting her medications, and meeting the home care nurse.

There is one more thing to add to this list. You need to make a “post-discharge” appointment with your wife’s health care provider within 7 days after she leaves the hospital. Studies show that these appointments can keep patients from being readmitted (needing to go back to the hospital) soon after discharge. But it can be hard to get an appointment that soon.

Here are some tips on getting an appointment within 7 days after discharge from the hospital:

- **Before your wife goes home, ask the doctor at the hospital to contact your wife’s health care provider.** Many hospitals have doctors called “hospitalists” who manage in-patient care but do not practice in the community. The hospitalist should update the provider about her hospitalization. This includes why she was admitted, what tests were done, what results are still pending, and any medications that were changed. The hospitalist should also mention that you will be calling for an appointment. Ask the hospital nurse, social worker, or case manager for help if you are not sure which doctor to ask.
- **Before your wife goes home, call her health care provider’s office to schedule an appointment.** Say that your wife is being discharged from the hospital. It may be that the provider’s office did not know that your wife was in the hospital.
- **Say why you need an appointment right away.** If you are comfortable with this, give some details about what happened, such as, “My wife couldn’t breathe and the hospital says she has congestive heart failure.” Or “My wife fell, hit her head, has a lot of stitches and because of her blood thinner she needs to be seen right away.”
- **If you have trouble getting an appointment, ask to speak with a nurse or other clinician at the health care provider’s office.** Tell this person the reason your wife was in the hospital, and list any new diagnoses and medication changes. (Some of this information may be found in the discharge order.) Ask for help getting an appointment within 7 days.
- **If you still have trouble getting an appointment, insist on speaking with the doctor.** Also try to email your health care provider if you think that could help.

If your wife does not have a regular health care provider, ask the hospital nurse, social worker, or case manager to suggest someone who is affiliated (works) with the hospital. It is often easier to get an appointment and share medical information when the hospital and health care provider are affiliated.

And of course, make sure to keep this appointment! This is one of the best ways you can help.