

Staying Safe

# In Hospital

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This guide is designed to make your stay in hospital as smooth and comfortable as possible.



## Acknowledgements

The Health Care Consumers' Association of the ACT (HCCA) acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land our organisation is located on and where we work, the Ngunnawal people. We acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region. We pay our respects to their ancestors and elders, past, present and emerging.

HCCA thanks all those who contributed to this adaptation of the Western Australian Department of Health *Patient First* resources for use as the *Staying Safe* resources in the Australian Capital Territory.

## About HCCA

The **Health Care Consumers' Association (HCCA)** is a health promotion agency and the peak consumer advocacy organisation in the Canberra region. HCCA provides a voice for consumers on local health issues and provides opportunities for health care consumers to participate in all levels of health service planning, policy development and decision making.

HCCA involves consumers through:

- consumer representation and consumer and community consultations
- training in health rights and navigating the health system
- health literacy education and resources
- community forums and information sessions about health services
- research into consumer experience of human services.

For more information contact HCCA at [www.hcca.org.au](http://www.hcca.org.au), on 02 6230 7800, or by email at [adminofficer@hcca.org.au](mailto:adminofficer@hcca.org.au)

**Disclaimer:** This publication is provided for information purposes only. It does not constitute medical advice. Information about a therapy, service, product or treatment does not imply endorsement and is not intended to replace advice from your health care professional. All users should seek advice from a qualified health care professional for advice relevant to their unique circumstances.



# Staying Safe in Hospital

**This guide is designed to make your stay in hospital as smooth and comfortable as possible.**

## 1. Your rights and responsibilities

You have the right to health care that is:



**You have the right to clear information so you:**

- Understand what is happening
- Can make choices about what is right for you

**This includes information in your preferred language about:**

- Your condition
- The possible benefits and risks of different tests and treatments
- Possible side effects of any medication or procedures
- How long it will take you to recover

You have a responsibility to treat the hospital staff and other patients with respect.

## 2. What you can do to stay safe



### Be involved in your care

During your stay you will be cared for by different people, who will keep each other up to date about your care and treatment. Hospital staff may call this “hand over”. You and your carer can be involved in this process. The National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards state that hand over should happen at your bedside at least once each day so that you know what is happening in your care and treatment. You will be able to ask questions and be involved in plans for your care.

If you think the information that is being discussed at hand-over is incorrect, you should speak up and let the staff know. If you don't understand what is being said, ask the staff caring for you or the nurse in charge to repeat or explain the information.

#### You can ask them to:

- Write it down
- Say it again
- Explain it simply
- Draw a picture for you, if the medical terms or names are unfamiliar
- Give you information in a language other than English.



### Asking questions

Asking questions helps you understand what is happening, and make the best health care decisions for you. It can also help keep you safe in hospital.

If you or your carer need an interpreter, ask the hospital staff to organise one. This is a free service for patients.

Ask questions and if you don't understand, ask again. The staff are responsible for explaining things in a way that makes sense to you. Your questions help them to explain things well. **They want you to understand**, and you need to let them know if you don't. They are happy to explain things often and in different ways for you.



### **Your treatment is your choice**

Before saying yes or no to any test or treatment, ask about your options. This helps you make the right decision for you. Remember, speak up if you don't understand.

**Hospital staff are happy to give you information and answer any questions you have.**

You can only give your informed consent (your “yes”) if you understand:

- Your condition
- How a test or treatment can help you
- The benefits and risks of the treatment, medicines, or operation.



### **Identification: right person, right place, right procedure**

Staff will regularly ask you to confirm your personal details, such your full name, date of birth and address. This is to make sure you receive the right care, from the right people, in the right place, at the right time. Staff may ask you the same questions many times each day so that they can make sure that they have the right patient for medication, tests or procedures, or if they are transferring you to another part of the hospital for example for a blood test or scan.



### **Before starting any medical procedure, medical staff will make a final check to confirm:**

- Your full name and date of birth
- Any allergies or bad reactions you may have to any medicines, food, or other things
- The procedure you are having
- The part of your body where the procedure is being performed (if applicable)
- Your consent form is complete, correct and signed by you.

**You will be asked the same questions many times. The health care team need to be sure they have everything right and that you know what is happening to you.**

# 3. Prevent yourself from falling

Falls can happen easily when you are unwell, taking new medicines, and in unfamiliar places.

Having a fall could cause you serious injury or mean you have to stay in hospital for longer.

Healthcare staff will talk to you about your risk of falling and work out ways to help make you safer.

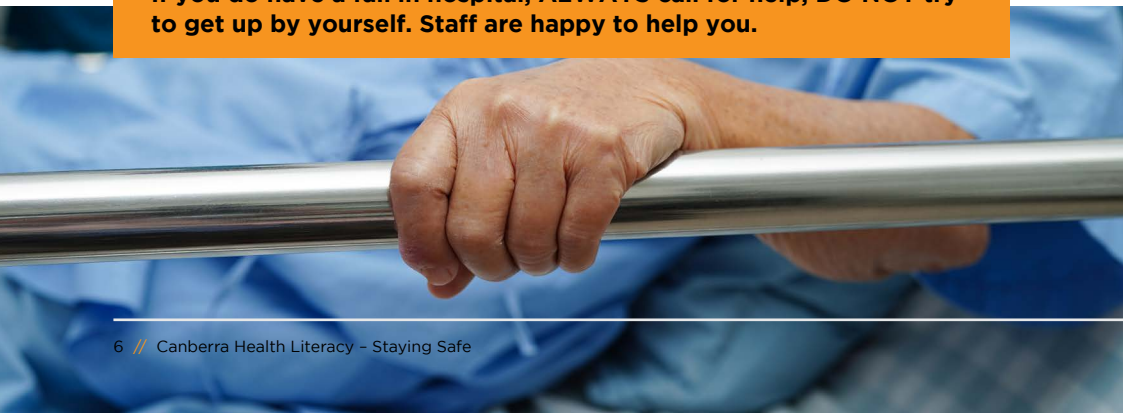
## You might need to:

- Call staff to assist you to go to the toilet if you need help or are nervous about falling
- Have the call bell within reach and use it to call for help
- Wear non-slip footwear – for example the grippy socks provided by the hospital
- Get up slowly after sitting or lying down
- Get more help than usual to move around
- Call staff for help if you are feeling unwell, dizzy, or there are hazards in your way
- Get to know your hospital room, furniture, and bathroom location
- Use your glasses, walking and hearing aids and keep them within easy reach - and **don't put them on the meal tray** where they can easily get lost
- Be extra careful in bathrooms and on wet floors.

## Your family and carer can help by:

- Letting nursing staff know when they are leaving
- Helping keep the hospital room and bed area clutter free
- Removing belongings that are no longer required.

**If you do have a fall in hospital, ALWAYS call for help, DO NOT try to get up by yourself. Staff are happy to help you.**



# 4. Prevent bed sores

In hospital bed sores are called pressure injuries. A pressure injury is redness, a break, or a blister on the skin caused by constant pressure on an area of the body.

They can be very painful, take a long time to heal (or sometimes never heal), and may affect your ability to move. Staff will assess your risk for a pressure injury and may give you some things to help prevent it, like heel protectors or a special mattress.



## **To help avoid getting a pressure injury, you can:**

- Change position in bed every 30 minutes (ask a nurse for help if you need it)
- Try to get out of bed and sit in a comfortable well-padded chair at least once a day - perhaps do it for meals, which can also make eating more comfortable
- Ask to talk to a physiotherapist about some gentle exercises you can do in bed to help prevent bed sores
- Walk around the room or ward if staff have told you it is OK to do so
- Drink plenty of water and eat healthy food
- Keep good posture when sitting
- Check your skin for signs of redness or blistering
- Moisturise your skin well.



## **Let nursing staff know straight away if you notice these early signs:**

- Redness that does not go away
- Broken or blistered skin
- Pain in a fixed area of your body such as heels or bottom
- Tingling or numbness.

If you cannot check all of your body, ask a nurse, family member or carer to check regularly for you.

Many patients will be given pressure stockings to wear while in hospital. Ask staff to help to put them on and let them know if they are causing you discomfort.



## 5. Prevent infection

An infection could slow your recovery and make you feel worse. Bacteria, or germs, that cause infections are usually spread by hand contact.

Practising good hand hygiene is one way to avoid infection.

### **This means:**

- Use running water and soap or an alcohol-based hand sanitiser to clean your hands
- Always wash or sanitise your hands after going to the toilet
- Wash or sanitise your hands after coughing and sneezing
- Wash or sanitise your hands before eating or touching food
- Ask your visitors to clean their hands before visiting your room.

**You can remind healthcare staff to wash or sanitise their hands before they examine you.**

### **Other ways to prevent infection include:**

- Avoid close contact with people who may have a spreadable illness, and ask people not to visit you if they are sick
- Try to cough and sneeze into your elbow and wash or sanitise your hands straight away
- Follow instructions from staff on how to care for any surgical or open wounds.



## 6. Cannula and catheter safety

You may need a cannula or catheter while you are in hospital. Cannulas are inserted into your veins which makes them high risk for infections. Catheters are also high risk for infections.

### **What you can do:**

- Tell staff if you have any concerns or notice any problems
- Protect the cannula or catheter from knocks or being pulled
- Wear loose clothing so that the cannula does not get caught
- Keep the cannula area dry while washing and showering
- Ensure that the protective dressing stays in place
- If your cannula has not been used in the last 24 hours, ask if you still need it.
- If your cannula is still in when you are going home, ask for it to be removed before you leave.

### **Infection risk – cannulas and catheters**

Tell staff as soon as possible about:

- Redness, pain or swelling at the site
- Feeling hot, cold or shivery
- Leakage from the device
- The dressing getting wet, bloodstained or loose
- If you have any questions or concerns about your cannula or catheter.





## 7. Your medicines

It's important that you keep track of your medicines if you take any. Taking the right medicine at the right time will help you get well.

Using medicines in the wrong way can cause unwanted side effects or affect other treatments that you may be having.

Most hospitals will not let you manage your own medication while you are in hospital even if you brought it in from home, including non-prescription ones.

**Ask your nurse before taking any medicine of your own during your stay**



### Medicines may be:

- tablets, capsules or liquids, patches, creams and ointments
- drops and sprays for eyes, nose, ears or mouth
- inhalers and puffers
- injections or implants
- pessaries or suppositories
- vitamins and dietary supplements
- natural or herbal remedies.



### To be medicine-wise in hospital:

- Make sure you tell staff about **all** the medicines you take, including over-the-counter medicines (for example paracetamol), vitamin supplements and herbal remedies
- Tell staff if you have had an allergic or bad reaction to any medicines, or if you have trouble swallowing medicines
- Tell staff straight away if you feel unwell after taking any medicine
- Ask the staff caring for you if you think you should have received some medicines, or the medicines appear different
- Make sure all medicines and how to take them are explained to you before you leave hospital
- Ask your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist if you don't understand your medicine instructions.



### Questions to ask about new medicines:

- What is this medicine for?
- How do I take it? Before meals or with meals? How many times a day? In the morning or evening?
- Are there any possible side effects?
- Can it be taken safely with the other medicines I'm taking?



## 8. Speak up if how you feel changes

Nobody knows your health like you do. You are the best person to notice any changes in your health.

Your family or carers who spend a lot of time with you may also see changes in how you look or act before healthcare staff notice the changes.

If you or your family or carer notice changes in your health, it's important to let the staff looking after you know as soon as possible.

### Some things to alert staff to include:

- changes in how fast you are breathing, or if you are finding it hard to breathe
- any new symptoms
- swelling, redness or tenderness anywhere but especially in your legs or feet
- feeling unusually hot and clammy
- having more pain than usual
- feeling confused, anxious, distressed, forgetful or angry
- concerns that you have had different medicines to usual
- feeling dizzy, extra drowsy or sleepy
- feeling like you are going to vomit, and
- any other changes that you are worried about.

The **Call and Respond Early** (CARE) program allows a patient or carer to inform the staff if a patient is getting sicker in hospital, and ask for their care to be reviewed. CARE runs at Canberra Hospital, University of Canberra Hospital, Centenary Hospital for Women and Children, Calvary Bruce Public Hospital and Calvary Bruce Private Hospital.

### Step 1

Press your buzzer – tell your nurse, midwife or doctor why you are worried

### Step 2

If you are still worried – ask to speak with the nurse or midwife in charge

### Step 3

If you are still worried and feel you need urgent help – call the CARE team at your hospital.

**Canberra Hospital** – 02 5124 3337

**University of Canberra Rehab Hospital** – 02 5124 3337

**North Canberra Hospital** – 02 5103 6717

**Calvary Bruce Private** – 02 6245 3111

**Calvary John James** – 02 6229 2110

## 9. Getting ready to go home

There are a number of things you need to think about before you go home:

- How will you get home?
- Do you have enough food at home to last until you can go shopping?
- Will you need help when you get home, for example with transport, shopping, cleaning or preparing meals?
- Don't forget to ask for a medical certificate if you need one
- Book an appointment with your GP if you need scripts for any new medication – you will only be given 3 days' worth of medication when you are discharged
- Get a copy of your discharge summary to give to your GP. The discharge summary is an overview of your symptoms and why you came into hospital, any new medications or changes to your medications, and the plan for future appointments, treatments or support that has been suggested for you
- If you brought any private x-rays to hospital, ask staff to return them to you
- Check you have any equipment or aids that you brought with you – don't forget your glasses, hearing aids and any charging cords for your devices.
- Check if you need to go to any outpatient appointments at the hospital and how to make an appointment if you need to.



### **Try to read your discharge summary before you leave hospital if it is available.**

Check that the information about you and your admission is correct and that you understand what needs to happen next. You can ask staff to help you to understand your discharge summary.



### **Ask the staff how you can get help at home if you need it.**

They may connect you with a social worker, Community Liaison Nurse or another health care professional who can give you advice and help with things like wound care, stoma care, continence advice, care for the dying, and post-chemotherapy support. They can also help organise follow up services for when you go home such as aged care assessments, counselling, nutrition advice, occupational therapy and physiotherapy.



## 10. When you are home

You can find tips and ideas about how to stay safe while you are home in the next booklet in this Staying Safe series:



### **Staying Safe – Now you are home**

You can find it on the Health Care Consumers' Association website or contact us for a printed version. Phone us on 02 6230 7800 or email [adminofficer@hcca.org.au](mailto:adminofficer@hcca.org.au).

# 11. Give feedback on your experience

Letting the health service know what was good and what was not good about your care helps them improve their services for everyone.

Every hospital has ways for you provide feedback about your care.

## **You can:**

- talk to a staff member
- ask a family member, friend, or carer to help you raise your concerns or speak on your behalf
- provide online feedback on the hospital website or the ACT Health app
- complete a compliments and complaints form

**You can provide feedback during or after your hospital stay.**

The Office of the ACT Health Services Commissioner can help if you are not satisfied with how a health service has responded to your complaint or feedback. It is part of the Human Rights Commission and is independent. You do not need to make a formal complaint to the health service before you contact the Health Services Commissioner. You can get free advice at any time.

**Find tips and support for making complaints in HCCA's Guide to Health Care Complaints. You can download the tip sheets at <https://www.hcca.org.au/takeaction/>**

## **Contact the ACT Health Services Commissioner:**

Phone: 02 6205 2222

Email: [HRCIntake@act.gov.au](mailto:HRCIntake@act.gov.au)

Make a complaint online: [www.hrc.act.gov.au/complaints/make-a-complaint-about-a-service/?Service=health](http://www.hrc.act.gov.au/complaints/make-a-complaint-about-a-service/?Service=health)

Find out more: <https://hrc.act.gov.au/complaints/>

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Adaptations made by HCCA have been guided by the input of health care consumers in the ACT and include information specific to the ACT health system.

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