



5 Questions to Ask Before Discharge

A plain-language conversation guide for the day someone is leaving a hospital, rehab, or skilled nursing stay.

1. WHAT SHOULD THE FIRST 72 HOURS LOOK LIKE?

- Ask the team to describe day one at home in order: getting inside, meals, bathroom trips, sleep, movement, wound or skin care, and rest.
- Ask which tasks are most important in the first three days and which tasks can wait.
- Write down any limits on stairs, lifting, bathing, driving, visitors, or being left alone.

2. WHAT CHANGED WITH MEDICINES AND SUPPLIES?

- Ask which medicines are new, stopped, changed, or taken only as needed.
- Ask what to do if a dose is missed, a prescription is not ready, or the instructions on the bottle do not match the discharge papers.
- Confirm supplies before leaving: dressings, gloves, incontinence items, oxygen, tubes, special food, or equipment instructions.

3. WHAT HELP AND EQUIPMENT MUST BE READY AT HOME?

- Ask about help with bathing, dressing, toileting, transfers, meals, stairs, walking, memory cues, and medication setup.
- Ask whether a walker, cane, shower chair, bedside commode, raised toilet seat, grab bar, bed rail, or delivery is needed before arrival.
- Confirm who orders each item, when it should arrive, and who to call if it does not.

4. WHAT WARNING SIGNS MEAN WE SHOULD CALL?

- Ask what changes are expected and what changes are not: fever, pain, breathing, confusion, falls, bleeding, swelling, wound changes, or not eating or drinking.
- Ask who to call during the day, who to call after hours, and when to use emergency services.
- Put the phone numbers on one page before the discharge folder gets scattered.

5. WHO OWNS EACH NEXT STEP?

- Confirm follow-up appointments, lab work, home health visits, therapy, transportation, paperwork, and pharmacy pickup.
- Ask for instructions in plain language if anything feels unclear.
- Before leaving, name the person responsible for each task. A plan is stronger when it has names, dates, and phone numbers.

This guide is general information, not medical advice. Follow the discharge team's instructions.

SOURCES CONSULTED

[AHRQ: IDEAL Discharge Planning](#) [MedlinePlus: Going home after a hospital stay](#) [Medicare: Your Discharge Planning Checklist](#)