

Hospital to Home

A Guide to a Safe,
Smooth Recovery



Exceptional Care
Quality of Life at Home
(650) 582-3020



Table Of Contents

01

Get Ready to Leave the Hospital

02

Meet Your Discharge Planner

03

Understand Insurance and Home-Care Coverage

04

Get Home Safely

05

Prepare Your Home for Recovery

06

Choose the Right Home Care Solution

07

Rehab – The Step Between Hospital and Home

08

Tools and Habits to Keep Recovery on Track

09

Meal Planning – Fuel Your Recovery

10

When Things Don't Go as Planned

11

Move Forward with Confidence



Introduction

Leaving the hospital is a big step. While it's a positive sign that recovery is underway, it's also the beginning of a new chapter that can feel overwhelming.

As the owner of Exceptional Care with thirty years in the field, I've met many families who weren't sure what to expect and how to prepare. That's why we created this guide — to walk you through the journey from hospital to home, and help you feel more confident about what comes after discharge.

Whether you're recovering from surgery, illness, or injury, this guide is here to support both patients and the people who care for them. You'll find practical advice and reminders to help make the transition smoother and safer.

Since 2020, Exceptional Care has supported families across Santa Clara and San Mateo counties with compassionate, professional, home care management and caregiving services. We've seen how much relief and reassurance the right caregiver or care manager can bring — not just through medical support, but by serving as a trusted presence during a vulnerable time.

If you're preparing to bring a loved one home from the hospital, or if you're the one healing, please know: you're not alone. Exceptional Care is proud to be your partner on this journey.

Warmly,

Audrey Vermont
Aging Life Care Manager and Executive Director
Exceptional Care



01: Get Ready to Leave the Hospital

What to Know Before Discharge Day

The best time to begin planning for discharge is not the day you're being wheeled out of the hospital — it's the moment your healthcare team starts discussing your recovery. Whether the stay was expected or unforeseen, discharge planning is essential to ensure a safe, smooth transition to home.

Questions to Ask While Still in the Hospital

Don't be afraid to speak up. The more information you gather before discharge, the better prepared you'll be at home. Here are key questions to ask your hospital care team:

- What is my expected recovery timeline and milestones?
- What medications will I need, and are there side effects to watch for?
- Will you schedule my follow-up appointments before I leave, or do I need to arrange them myself once I've been released?
- Do I have any dietary restrictions or physical limitations?
- Will I need any medical equipment at home, such as a walker, oxygen tank, or hospital bed?
- What symptoms or changes should I watch for that might necessitate a call to the doctor or my return to the hospital?
- Is home healthcare being arranged for me and, if so, what services will the provider offer?

Time moves quickly in the hospital. Discharge can happen with only a day of notice, so it's wise to begin preparations even before you receive an official discharge date. If you aren't ready to leave because you feel like you need more medical help or your home isn't ready, a care manager can help advocate for you with the hospital.



Take notes or request a written discharge plan. Having everything in writing helps prevent misunderstandings once you're home.

DID YOU KNOW?

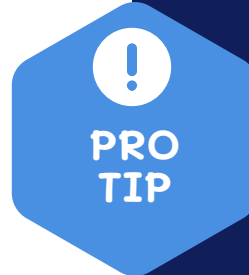
Roughly 20% of Medicare patients are readmitted to the hospital within 30 days of discharge, often due to lack of proper follow-up care. (Source: Patient Safety Network)

02: Meet Your Discharge Planner

How to approach this sensitive topic with empathy and confidence

The Unsung Hero of Your Hospital Stay

The discharge planner, sometimes called a case manager, is typically a nurse or social worker with specialized training in post-hospital care coordination. While doctors and nurses focus on your immediate medical needs, the discharge planner is looking ahead. Their role is to ensure your recovery continues once you leave the hospital.



Don't start the conversation about in-home care when you're rushed, emotional, or handling a stressful situation such as a medical emergency. Instead, choose a time for the discussion when everyone is calm.

Coordinating Care

Discharge planners act as the central hub for communication between hospital staff, patients, families, and outside care providers. They assess each patient's unique situation — medical condition, home environment, support system, insurance coverage — and tailor a discharge plan accordingly.

They're the ones who help line up home healthcare services, arrange for needed medical equipment, and ensure prescriptions are filled and ready. If you'll need physical therapy, nursing visits, or follow-up appointments, the discharge planner ensures everything is scheduled and understood. They also take the time to educate families on what to expect, helping to relieve anxiety and reduce the risk of complications after discharge.

Information You Need Before Discharge

Before discharge, the planner should provide a written care plan that includes:

- A summary of your hospital stay and diagnosis
- Medications to take, including how and when to take them
- Follow-up appointments and referrals
- Instructions for wound care, mobility, or therapy
- Contact information for home health services
- Red flags to watch for — and what to do if they appear
- Who to contact with questions or concerns

If anything is unclear, speak up. Remember, the discharge planner is your advocate and a key ally during a vulnerable time.

DID YOU KNOW?

Some hospitals make patients recite the answers to the four Ds of Discharge before letting them go: Diagnosis, Drugs, Directions and Diet.

03: Understand Insurance and Home-Care Coverage

What's Covered, What's Not, and How to Navigate the Paperwork

What's Covered and What's Not

"Will insurance cover this?" That's the question on nearly every patient's mind as their home treatment plan is being developed. The answer depends on the type of insurance you have and the type of care you need.

- **Medicare:** Typically covers short-term home health services if they're medically necessary and have been prescribed by a doctor. These services may include skilled nursing, physical therapy, occupational therapy, and sometimes medical social services. To qualify, you must be considered homebound, meaning leaving home requires substantial effort.
- **Medicaid:** Coverage varies by state but is reserved for individuals with long-term needs or limited income. It may include personal care services (help with bathing, dressing, etc.) in addition to skilled medical care.
- **Private insurance:** Individual providers and plans determine coverage. It can vary widely. Many plans do include home healthcare, but the scope, duration, and conditions may differ. Often the discharge planner or home-care agency can help clarify what's covered and assist in the paperwork involved.

Prior Authorizations

Before services can begin, many insurance plans — including Medicare and most private insurers — require prior authorization. Your healthcare provider must submit a request proving that home care is medically necessary.

- A recent hospitalization or documented illness
- A doctor's referral specifying the type of care needed
- A homebound status, in most cases
- Services that must be delivered by a skilled professional (not just custodial care)

The approval process can take several days, so you'll want to begin the prior authorization process while still in the hospital. Otherwise, your care may be delayed.

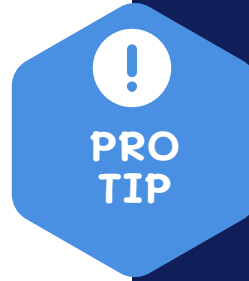
DID YOU KNOW?

The most common diagnoses requiring home health care are: Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), heart failure, and post-surgical recovery. Other prevalent diagnoses include stroke recovery, diabetes management, and multiple chronic conditions.

Manage Out-of-Pocket Costs

Even with insurance, you may face out-of-pocket costs. These might include:

- Copays for visits or services
- Deductibles that haven't yet been met
- Non-covered services such as extended personal care or companion services
- Medical equipment or supplies not fully reimbursed



Ask your home-care provider to help with prior authorization paperwork — they do it every day and know what insurers need to see.

Nobody wants a surprise medical bill, so ask for a breakdown of estimated costs up front. A reputable home-care agency will explain what's covered, what isn't, and offer guidance on how to minimize expenses. In some cases, they may help connect you with financial aid programs, veterans' benefits, or sliding-scale options based on income.

04: Get Home Safely

Planning Transportation for a Smooth Transition

The journey home from the hospital, no matter how short, can greatly affect recovery. A bumpy or stressful ride can undo the progress made in the hospital, especially for patients recovering from surgery or an injury.

Talk to your discharge planner about the logistics of getting home. Key questions are:

- Can you walk unassisted?
- Will you need help getting into a vehicle?
- Do you have post-operative restrictions, such as not being able to bend or sit upright?
- What items do you need to have on or next to you in the vehicle?

Aim for a calm, unrushed trip. Choose a driver who can assist physically if needed and make sure the vehicle is comfortable and easy to enter.

If Family or Friends Are Unavailable

Not everyone has a friend or relative who can provide a ride — and that's okay. There are several safe, professional alternatives:

- **Non-emergency medical transport:** These services are designed specifically for patients who need assistance during travel. The providers offer vehicles equipped with stretchers, wheelchairs, or other aids.
- **Home-care agencies:** Many home-care agencies have a partnership with transportation services and can help coordinate a ride.
- **Ride-share programs:** Uber, Lyft, or similar services may be an option if you are mobile and don't require special equipment.
- **Community-based services:** Some local senior resource centers offer volunteer driver programs or subsidized transportation for medical needs.

Explore these options before discharge to avoid delays and last-minute scrambling.



Have two people on hand – such as the driver and a nurse – when getting into a car to go home. One person can guide you and the other one can help support your weight.

Accessibility and Mobility Considerations

Think through every step of the trip in terms of mobility and comfort.

Ask yourself:

- Will I need a wheelchair or walker?
- Will someone be available to help get me and my belongings out of the car?
- Does my home have steps or narrow doorways that might be hard to navigate?
- Will someone meet me at home and help me get settled?

Safe transport must include a smooth handoff to the next phase of care.

DID YOU KNOW?

Nearly 20% of elderly patients experience adverse events within 30 days of hospital discharge, with transportation issues being a significant contributing factor. (Source: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality)

05: Prepare Your Home for Recovery

Fall Prevention, Equipment, and Creating a Healing Environment

Fall Prevention and Equipment Setup

Once you or your loved one arrives home, safety becomes the number one priority. A hospital stay often leaves patients weaker than before, and the risk of falls or injury can be high, especially in those first few days after discharge.

Here's how to create a safer home environment, whether for yourself or a loved one:

- Clear walkways of cords, rugs, or clutter that could be a tripping hazard.
- Install grab bars in bathrooms near toilets and showers.
- Use non-slip mats in showers or tubs.
- Ensure good lighting, especially in hallways and near stairs.
- Set up necessary medical equipment — such as walkers, wheelchairs, hospital beds, or oxygen tanks — in advance.
- Place items within easy reach to avoid bending or overexertion.

A home-care agency care manager or visiting nurse can also do a safety check and recommend adjustments. Taking these precautions up front prevents emergency room visits later.

Setting Up a “Recovery Zone”

Designate a specific area of the home as the recovery zone — a quiet, comfortable space where the patient can rest, heal, and receive care without disruption. This can be a bedroom, living room, or any room that offers:

- A bed or recliner with supportive cushions
- Easy access to a bathroom
- A table or tray for medications, water, and personal items
- A phone or call bell within reach
- Nearby outlets for medical devices or chargers
- Natural light and calming surroundings

Think of this space as a mini-wellness retreat. The more peaceful and practical it is, the easier the recovery process becomes.



Use a medication reminder app with shared access so multiple caregivers can help you track doses in real time.

Items to Have Ready Before You Arrive

Don't wait until you're home to realize something's missing. Here's a basic checklist of what to have in place:

- Prescribed medications, filled and organized
- Medical supplies, like bandages, gloves, or wound care items
- Mobility aids, such as a walker, cane, or wheelchair Adaptive tools, like a shower chair or raised toilet seat
- Clean linens, towels, and comfortable clothing
- A thermometer, blood pressure cuff, or other monitoring devices
- A printed care plan and emergency contact list

Preparation provides peace of mind. By setting up a safe, supportive space in advance, you give yourself the best chance for a smooth recovery and reduce the likelihood of hospital readmission.

DID YOU KNOW?

Falls are the leading cause of injury-related death among adults ages 65 and older. (Source: Centers for Disease Control)

06: Choose the Right Home Care Solution

Types of Services: Skilled, Rehab, and More

Not all home care is the same. You'll want to select the right support for your recovery.

- **Skilled nursing care** – Licensed professionals such as Registered Nurses (RNs) or Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs/LVNs) can manage complex medical needs such as medication administration, wound care, post-surgical monitoring, and more.
- **Rehabilitation services** – Physical, occupational, or speech therapy specialists help patients regain strength, movement, and independence in daily tasks.
- **Home-Care or Home-Health aides** – Aides provide assistance with daily living activities – bathing, dressing, toileting, and light housekeeping – under the supervision of a care manager or medical team.
- **Companion care** – Offering non-medical support, companions help with errands, meals, or simply keep the patient company. Especially valuable for seniors living alone, this kind of care supports emotional and mental well-being.

Your doctor or discharge planner will recommend the type of care you need, but you have a voice in who provides it and how.

Insurance-Covered vs. Private Pay

Understanding how care is paid for is just as important as understanding what's needed. Some home-care services are fully or partially covered by Medicare, Medicaid, Medicare Advantage plans, and private health insurance. Typically, skilled medical care is more likely to be covered, while non-medical support – like personal aides or long-term help with daily activities – may require private pay.

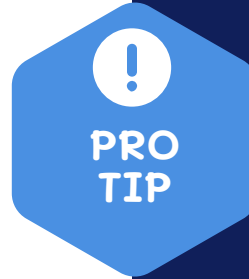
DID YOU KNOW?

Over 70% of adults aged 65+ will need some form of long-term care at some point – often beginning with short-term home support. (Source: ACL Administration for Community Living)

What to Expect from a Quality Home-Care Provider

Choosing a provider is about more than finding someone with the right skills. You also want the person to be someone you like and trust. A quality home-care agency will:

- Conduct a thorough in-home assessment to tailor services to your needs
- Hire certified, background-checked caregivers and clinicians
- Provide a clear care plan with regular updates
- Be responsive to concerns or emergencies
- Assign staff with whom you can build a long-term rapport
- Communicate clearly with family members and doctors



When interviewing agencies, ask what backup plan they have if your assigned caregiver is unavailable.

Good care provides peace of mind. The right agency will not only support the patient but also ease the burden for families, making the recovery journey easier for everyone involved.

07: Rehab – The Step Between Hospital and Home

When Short-Term Rehab Is the Best Next Move

When Rehab Is Recommended

Not every patient returns home immediately when discharged from the hospital. Sometimes a short-term stay at a rehabilitation facility – also known as a skilled nursing facility (SNF) – is the safest next step. This is especially true for patients who need intensive physical therapy, 24/7 medical supervision, or help regaining strength and function before living independently again.



Even in assisted living or rehab, some patients need one-on-one supervision. Ask if a home-care provider can supplement facility staff. (Source: Little Nursing Home)

Doctors and discharge planners usually recommend rehab when:

- The patient is too weak to manage daily tasks on their own
- There's a high risk of falls or complications without supervision
- Post-surgical recovery requires close monitoring or pain management
- Therapy is needed several times a day to restore movement or speech

Transitioning from Rehab to Home

Once therapy goals are met, patients are typically cleared to go home – but that doesn't mean the support ends. In fact, the transition from rehab back to home is another critical turning point in the recovery journey.

This is where home healthcare agencies step in. They can continue the work started in rehab: assisting with medication, therapy, wound care, and daily living activities. They can also help ease the adjustment emotionally and practically, ensuring that the patient doesn't lose progress after leaving the structured environment of a facility.

Coordinating Care Between Facilities and Providers

Coordination between hospital, rehab, home-health and home-care teams is essential and often complex. Each setting may have its own providers, paperwork, and protocols.

A reliable home caregiving agency with aging life care managers bridges those gaps. They work directly with rehab facilities, assisted living centers, and even independent living communities to create continuity of care through each stage of recovery.

DID YOU KNOW?

Nearly 40% of hospital patients aged 65+ are discharged to rehab or skilled nursing facilities — not directly home. (Source: ScienceDirect)

08: Tools and Habits to Keep Recovery on Track

Care Journals, Medication Tracking, and Follow-Up Strategies

Communication, Coordination, and Follow-Up Care

Healing is a team effort involving doctors, nurses, family, and caregivers. To keep everyone aligned, good communication is key. One of the simplest but most effective tools is a care journal. Whether it's a notebook or digital document, this journal can track:

- Medication times and any side effects
- Questions to ask at appointments
- Notes from doctor visits or therapy sessions
- Mood changes or unusual symptoms
- Daily routines and progress updates

Keeping this kind of log helps expose worrisome patterns and prevent miscommunication. It also gives you and your healthcare providers a clear picture of your recovery.

Medication Tracking

It's easy to get overwhelmed by multiple medications — especially if doses are taken at different times or look similar. That's where organization becomes a lifesaver:

- Use a pill organizer with compartments labeled by day and time.
- Create a medication chart with names, dosages, times, and special instructions (e.g., take with food).
- Set reminders using a smartphone app, alarm clock, or calendar alerts.
- Track each dose on a paper checklist or digital log — especially when multiple caregivers are involved.

Home-care nurses or aging life care manager can also help establish these routines and ensure consistency during the first critical days at home.

DID YOU KNOW?

Patients and caregivers who use digital tools to track appointments and medications report lower stress levels and better care coordination.
(Source: 1+1 Cares)

Use Technology to Stay Organized

Mobile apps and shared calendars can make a world of difference for families managing care together. Apps like Google Calendar, CareZone, or Medisafe allow you to:

- Schedule and share upcoming appointments
- Set medication reminders
- Track vitals or symptoms
- Coordinate visits from family, friends, or professionals

This kind of visibility reduces stress and keeps everyone informed.



Create a shared Google Calendar for appointments and caregiving shifts – and invite everyone involved in care.

Stay on Top of Appointments

Follow-up care – whether that’s doctor visits, therapy sessions, lab work, or imaging – is crucial to a successful recovery. Missed appointments can result in setbacks and complications.

Home-care providers can help patients remember and prepare for doctor or lab visits, arrange transportation, and even relay information between different providers. With proactive scheduling and follow-up, families and patients can stay ahead of issues and keep recovery moving forward.

09: Nutrition and Meal Planning – Fuel Your Recovery

Dietary Needs, Smart Meal Prep, and the Role of Home-Care Aides

Dietary Needs Based on Surgery or Condition

Food isn't just about comfort during recovery — it's medicine. The right nutrition can accelerate healing, strengthen the immune system, and even reduce inflammation and pain. Your dietary needs will vary depending on your condition or surgery:

- Post-surgical patients may need high-protein diets to promote tissue repair.
- Diabetics must manage blood sugar carefully with balanced meals.
- Heart patients often require low-sodium, heart-healthy foods.
- Patients on certain medications may need to avoid specific foods



Smoothies are a great way to sneak in protein, calories and hydration, especially if you're underweight or have a small appetite.

. It's important to follow the discharge instructions or consult with a dietitian if available.

DID YOU KNOW?

Older adults recovering from surgery need up to 50% more protein than usual to promote tissue repair. (Source: Science Direct)

Meal Planning Tips for Caregivers

Meal prep can be relatively simple with a bit of planning. Batch cook and freeze meals in individual portions. Create a weekly meal calendar. And keep water, fruit, sandwich fixings, and snacks readily accessible.

Many home-care agencies include aides who assist with daily nutrition. Their support can be invaluable, especially when a patient lives alone or has mobility issues.

Home-care aides may help with:

- Meal planning and grocery shopping
- Preparing or reheating meals
- Monitoring appetite and fluid intake
- Noticing changes in eating habits, which may signal new medical concerns

By having an extra set of hands — and eyes — on nutrition, families can feel more confident that their loved one is receiving the nutrition they need to get stronger, day by day.

10: When Things Don't Go as Planned

Know When to Get Help

Even with the best planning, recovery doesn't always follow a straight line to perfect health. Sometimes problems arise. Recognizing them early can make all the difference.

Common red flags include:

- A sudden spike in temperature (fever)
- Shortness of breath or chest pain
- Confusion or extreme drowsiness
- Unusual swelling, redness, or discharge around a surgical site
- Missed medications or unusual side effects
- Persistent vomiting, diarrhea, or refusal to eat or drink



Keep phone numbers of emergency contacts and medical providers on the fridge where they can quickly be found in a crisis.

If anything feels “off,” trust your instincts. Call your doctor or home-healthcare nurse immediately. It's better to check and be wrong than to delay and regret it.

Updating Your Care Plan

A care plan isn't carved in stone. It should evolve with your needs. If mobility becomes more limited, medication changes, or emotional health declines, it's time to reassess.

Work with your home-care provider or primary physician to:

- Adjust the daily routine or medication schedule
- Add new services (such as physical therapy or behavioral health support)
- Review goals and timelines for recovery
- Communicate changes to everyone involved in care

Updating the plan ensures you stay safe and are on the best path for your continued recovery.

How Home-Care Providers Respond to Emergencies

One of the biggest advantages of working with a professional home-care agency is knowing someone has your back — especially in a crisis. Most agencies have clear protocols for urgent situations, including:

- Immediate contact with the doctor or medical team
- Coordination with 911 or transport if emergency care is needed
- On-call nursing staff for after-hours concerns
- Real-time documentation and communication with family members

Home-care professionals are a vital lifeline, helping you stay safe at home and reducing unnecessary ER trips or rehospitalizations. It's impossible to predict exactly how a recovery will go. Complications can happen. But with caregivers who know what to look for and how to respond, you and your family can face the unexpected calmly and with peace of mind.

DID YOU KNOW?

Early recognition of infection or complications can reduce hospital readmissions by over 30%.
(Source: Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services)

11: Move Forward with Confidence

The Exceptional Care Difference and Real Stories from Families

Help Is Just a Call Away

The road to recovery after a hospital stay isn't easy. It's full of unfamiliar decisions, emotional moments, and constant questions. But you or your loved one don't have to go it alone. Having the right care team at your side can accelerate recovery and make transitioning back to regular daily life less stressful.

The Exceptional Care Difference

Since 2020, Exceptional Care has helped families throughout Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties navigate the challenges of post-hospital transitions. Our mission is simple: to provide personalized, professional, and compassionate care that promotes healing. What sets us apart?

- **Customized and frequently updated care plans** designed for the patient's unique medical, emotional, and daily needs
- **Highly trained, experienced caregivers** who are skilled in spotting potential health concerns and responding quickly
- **Strong communication** with families, physicians, and specialists to ensure continuity and transparency
- **Secure technology** that keeps you connected and informed, wherever you are

Whether you or your loved one is transitioning from hospital to home, settling into assisted living, or recovering in a rehab facility, we're with you to provide skilled health care services.



Real Stories from Families We've Helped



Exceptional Care has been a true godsend for me, helping to care for two family members with dementia at home.

– B.H. Los Gatos



Audrey Vermont has taken care of my mother for the past two years and I feel so blessed to have her as our team leader.

– C.R. Saratoga



Audrey is an amazingly knowledgeable professional with a heart and a brain. My mom and dad were well taken care of. I had to make critical decisions and am thankful to Audrey for her experience, wisdom and humanity. I'm grateful to Audrey for helping Mom and Dad stay in their home.

– H.P. Palo Alto

Let's Talk

Choosing a caregiver after hospitalization is a big decision, but it doesn't have to be overwhelming. With Exceptional Care, you'll never have to figure out a care plan alone. Let us guide you through the process, answer your questions, and deliver the care you or your loved one deserves.

Visit us at exceptionalcare.co to learn more or contact us at:

Audrey Vermont
avermont@exceptionalcare.co
(650) 582-3020 x1

Exceptional Care
761 University Avenue, Suite D
Los Gatos, CA 95032