

Senior Matters

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This month, I want to focus on something that makes some people cringe when they hear the word: HOSPITALIZATION. Just thinking about being hospitalized can be very scary for some but for older individuals it can evoke a fear that is disproportionate to the severity of the medical problem that landed them there. Why, you may ask? Perhaps it's the uncertainty and questioning that goes along with it.

Will they just brush me off because of my age?

Do I really want to know what is wrong with me?

And the most often asked question. Will they let me go home again?

So, what can you do to lessen your chances of being hospitalized? Learn to recognize symptoms and listen to what your body is telling you. For instance, if you notice the onset of dizziness...unsteadiness...lack of balance....low-grade fever above 99 degrees...confusion...sleep pattern alterations (sleeping more or less), you may have a urinary tract infection (UTI).

If you notice yourself being off balance, confused or lethargic, you may be dehydrated.

If you find yourself falling or experiencing an altered gait, you may have a UTI, visual problem, early Dementia, inner ear problem, infection, etc.

If you are feeling out of sorts and it's not Flu season you may need your medications evaluated or perhaps blood work run.

My point here is that you don't just accept what is happening as 'aging'. You need to listen to your body and take action. Make sure you have a good relationship with your medical provider. This is imperative so that you can call and explain what you're feeling and your doctor listens and helps you through it.

Now then, what should you do if you find yourself hospitalized?

First and foremost, you must be your own advocate. As you are aware, hospitals have 'hospitalists' taking care of patients so your primary physician may not even know you've been hospitalized. Make that call. Ask your doctor to confer with the doctor who's treating you. This can prevent a lot of unnecessary tests and get you out much sooner. It could also make the difference between getting home and ending up somewhere else. Second, make sure your hospitalist knows your complete medical history and all the medications, including supplements you are taking.

Also, make sure you are compliant. Listen to what the nurses, therapists, doctors and case managers are telling you to do and do it. Get out of bed and walk as soon as you've been cleared to do so. Lying in bed twenty four hours a day causes muscle weakness, atrophy and decline.

Of utmost importance. Don't, wait until you are told you're being discharged to make your post-hospital plans. Ask to see the hospital case manager and get information on rehab facilities, in-home personal care providers, assisted living centers, emergency alert systems, etc. You or your family need to be involved in the planning process or the decision will be made for you.

If you are unable to make your needs known, understand the tests they plan for you or have input in post-discharge plans, hire a professional life care manager, a professional who will advocate for you, decipher the medical pathway and help get you home again.