

Emotional Problems: Staying Well After Release From the Hospital



Sometimes a mental illness can make you feel bad enough to be in the hospital. This may happen with an illness such as depression, bipolar disorder, or schizophrenia. When you leave the hospital, your care does not end. This is an important time to get follow-up care, which means working with a doctor, your loved ones, and often a counselor.

Why is follow-up care important?

Managing a mental illness is not something you have to do alone. Follow-up care helps you get the right support and treatment, such as medicines and counseling. It can help you avoid having a relapse or going back to the hospital. Talk to your doctor about scheduling a follow-up visit. It is best if you can have a follow-up visit within a week of leaving the hospital.

Who should be involved in your care?

A **discharge planner** is someone who helps set up your follow-up care when you leave the hospital. You can ask for a form that explains

your treatment plan and has information about medicines, counseling, and other care. The form may have contact information for doctors or counselors, along with follow-up appointment times.

You also can get help from:

- A doctor. You may see a different doctor than you did before.
- A counselor.
- Family, friends, and others who can support you.

With some conditions, like schizophrenia, you may have a **case manager** who helps you follow your treatment plan.

Counseling and social support

Counseling

Counseling can help you manage your symptoms and prevent a relapse. You may go to a counselor along with taking medicines. A licensed mental health counselor can help you to:

- Change harmful thoughts and actions.
- Solve problems and manage stress.
- Improve your relationships.

A good counselor also gives support and encouragement. Make sure to find a counselor that you trust and feel comfortable with. You can ask your friends or family to help you get to your counseling sessions.

Social support

Support from family, loved ones, and others plays a big part in helping you get better. They can be there to talk, encourage you, and help you follow your treatment plan. You can also get support from local or online support groups, which let you talk with others who are going through something similar.

For more information, contact the **National Alliance on Mental Illness** at www.nami.org.

How to care for yourself at home

After you get home, follow your treatment plan to help keep your symptoms from coming back.

- Take your medicines exactly as your doctor says. If your medicines cause side effects or do not help, your doctor may change them to find what works best.
- Keep taking your medicines, even after you feel better. Talk to your doctor before you stop any medicines.
- Go to all of your doctor and counselor visits. Call your doctor if you notice that your symptoms are getting worse.
- Get plenty of physical activity.
- Eat healthy and include plenty of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.
- Find ways to lower your stress, such as managing your time, having support, getting enough sleep, and doing hobbies you like.
- Avoid using drugs and alcohol.

For family and friends

Helping a loved one deal with a mental illness can be hard at times. You may not always know what to do or how to help. But your support makes a big difference. You can help make sure your loved one gets the right care and treatment.

- Go over the hospital discharge plan with your loved one to make sure it is clear.
- Give encouragement and support. This may mean helping your loved one remember doctor visits, take medicines, or make lifestyle changes.
- Take time for yourself, and find ways to ease stress, like staying active.
- Do not blame yourself for your loved one's mental illness.

When to call your doctor

Call 911 if:

- You feel like hurting yourself or someone else.
- Someone you know has a mental illness and is about to attempt or is attempting suicide.

Call your doctor now or seek medical care right away if:

- Symptoms you have had before, such as the ones you had when you were in the hospital, are coming back.
- You have side effects from your medicines.
- You hear voices or think that someone is trying to harm you.
- Someone you know has a mental illness and:
 - Starts to give away his or her possessions.
 - Uses illegal drugs or drinks alcohol heavily.
 - Talks or writes about death, including writing suicide notes or talking about guns, knives, or pills.
 - Starts to spend a lot of time alone.
 - Acts very aggressive or suddenly appears calm.