Emergency Room Go-Bag Checklist

Information packet first. Physical bag second.

Do not delay emergency care to pack a bag. If the situation may be life-threatening, or you have been told to call emergency services, get help first. A go-bag is preparation for the moments when there is time to grab it - not a reason to wait.

Part 1 - Information packet

Prepare the information emergency staff may need before worrying about comfort items.

The five essentials

- ☐ Current medication list
- ☐ Known medication allergies and reactions, if known
- ☐ Primary family / emergency contact information
- ☐ Photo ID and insurance information
- ☐ Information about any advance directive or healthcare decision-maker documentation that may be relevant

Keep this packet current. Replace outdated medication lists, insurance information, and contact information as things change.

Medication, allergy & medical information

Use current written information where possible. Do not use the go-bag to make medication decisions.

Medication	Strength / directions	Notes

Known medication allergies

Medication / Substance	Reaction if known

Important medical information for emergency care

Do not give home medications in the ER unless ER staff instruct you to do so. If you bring medication bottles or containers, tell staff and follow the facility's instructions.

Contacts, ID & healthcare documents

Make the existence and location of key information easy to communicate.

Contact / Role	Name	Phone

- ☐ Photo identification
- ☐ Health insurance card / current insurance information
- ☐ Advance directive, if one exists
- ☐ Healthcare proxy / medical power of attorney documentation, if applicable
- ☐ POLST/MOLST or other medical-orders form, if applicable
- ☐ Location of current signed healthcare-planning documents

Document / insurance notes

Part 2 - Physical bag

Keep it small, practical and easy to grab.

Vision, hearing & communication

- [ ] Glasses and protective case
- [ ] Hearing aids, case and charger/batteries
- [ ] Dentures and labeled container, if applicable
- [ ] Communication aid or written communication needs, if used

Phone & practical items

- [ ] Phone
- [ ] Charging cable and plug
- [ ] Simple sweater or light layer
- [ ] Easy-on footwear if appropriate
- [ ] Small notepad and pen
- [ ] One comfort item if genuinely useful and easy to keep track of

Leave home when possible

- [ ] Jewelry and sentimental valuables
- [ ] Large amounts of cash
- [ ] Extra credit cards or unnecessary keys
- [ ] Expensive electronics that are not needed
- [ ] A large supply of personal belongings 'just in case'

Grab location & emergency handoff card

Make sure someone besides the primary caregiver can find the bag.

- [ ] Choose one storage location near an exit or other logical grab point.
- [ ] Label the bag clearly.
- [ ] Keep the information packet in the same place every time.
- [ ] Tell at least one backup caregiver where it is.
- [ ] Review the contents after a hospitalization or major medication/document change.

Emergency handoff card

Field	Current information

Suggested fields: full name/date of birth; primary family contact; primary care clinician; medication-list location; allergy-list location; healthcare-document location; glasses/hearing aids/dentures location.

Final check before the bag goes back to its grab spot

Keep the system ready for the next crisis.

- [ ] Medication list is current.
- [ ] Allergy information is current.
- [ ] Contact information is current.
- [ ] ID/insurance information is current.
- [ ] Healthcare-document information/location is current.
- [ ] Phone charger and hearing-aid/glasses supplies are present if appropriate.
- [ ] Valuables have not accumulated in the bag.
- [ ] Backup caregiver knows where the bag is.

Additional notes

Important: This checklist is an educational and organizational tool for family caregivers. It is not medical or legal advice and does not replace emergency instructions or the advice of healthcare professionals. Do not delay emergency care to gather a bag or documents. If the situation may be life-threatening, contact emergency services. Follow ER staff instructions about medications, valuables and personal items.

Developed using: AARP caregiver emergency-preparedness guidance, health-system ER preparation guidance, and FDA medication-safety guidance for older adults.

Designed with care. Built for Clarity.