First Week Home After Hospital

A practical caregiver checklist for the first days and weeks after discharge

Use this with the written discharge instructions.
This checklist helps you keep information, follow-up, household needs and family responsibilities organized. Follow the individualized directions provided by your family member's health care team.

Start with these five things

If you only have a few minutes right now:

- ☐ Put the discharge instructions and current medication list in one place where everyone helping can find them.
- ☐ Write down the phone number the discharge team gave you for questions or concerns.
- ☐ Confirm the current medication instructions exactly as provided at discharge. If anything is unclear or conflicts, contact the appropriate clinician or pharmacist.
- ☐ Make sure needed prescriptions, equipment, supplies and transportation are actually in place.
- ☐ Confirm the next follow-up step, including any appointment already scheduled or still needing to be arranged.

The first 24 hours home

The goal is to make the discharge plan usable at home, not to create a perfect system.

- ☐ Give discharge paperwork a permanent landing spot.
- ☐ Keep the current medication list with the discharge paperwork.
- ☐ Write down the contact person/number for questions after discharge.
- ☐ Record what the discharge team told you to watch for and what they told you to do if a concern occurs.
- ☐ Confirm equipment and supplies arrived and that the family understands the instructions provided for using them.
- ☐ Assign the immediate family jobs for tonight and tomorrow morning.

My call-first contact:

Days 2-3: Close the loose ends

Look for anything that still depends on a phone call, delivery, appointment or another person.

Follow-up

- [ ] Confirm what follow-up is expected in the written discharge instructions.
- [ ] Record who the appointment is with, date/time, transportation and what information to bring.
- [ ] If follow-up is required but not scheduled, use the contact instructions you were given to find out what to do next.

Follow-up / Provider	Date & Time	Transportation / Notes

Pending results

- [ ] If discharge paperwork identifies a pending result, write down what is pending.
- [ ] Record when you were told to expect it and who is responsible for communicating it.
- [ ] Record who to contact if it is not received when expected.

Pending item	Expected	Who follows up?

Arranged services and supplies

- [ ] Confirm any home health, therapy, nursing, equipment delivery or other arranged service actually connected.
- [ ] Write down the provider/agency, first visit or delivery, contact number and what the family is responsible for between visits.
- [ ] If the plan said someone would contact you and they have not, use the contact information provided by the hospital, insurer or service organization to follow up.

Questions for the care team

Kitchen & household readiness

Start with the written food, fluid and dietary instructions provided by the care team.

- [ ] Foods and drinks on hand that fit the instructions provided by the care team.
- [ ] Simple meals or ingredients that reduce unnecessary caregiver workload.
- [ ] Household items needed to follow the discharge plan.
- [ ] Easy-to-reach drinks, snacks or meal items if accessibility is an issue.
- [ ] Enough basics to avoid an emergency grocery run.

Specific family assignments

Task	Person	When	Done
Prescription pickup			
Grocery / meal help			
Transportation			
Equipment / supplies			
Family update			
Other:			

The rest of week one

Check whether the plan that looked workable on paper is actually workable at home.

- [ ] Review the jobs that appeared this week: medications, transportation, meals, calls, appointments, equipment, paperwork and family communication.
- [ ] Move open tasks out of one person's head and onto one shared list.
- [ ] Redistribute work where possible if one caregiver is carrying nearly everything.
- [ ] Prepare the current medication list, discharge paperwork and question list for the first follow-up visit.
- [ ] Keep unresolved service, supply and appointment issues visible until they are closed.

What is still unresolved?

Who is doing what?

A useful assignment names the task, the person and the deadline.

Task	Responsible person	Due	Status	Notes / contact

First follow-up appointment prep

Bring the information the clinician asked for, and keep interpretation with the clinician.

- ☐ Discharge paperwork requested for the appointment.
- ☐ Current medication list.
- ☐ Questions that came up at home.
- ☐ Open follow-up tasks or services.
- ☐ Any records the clinician specifically asked you to keep.

Questions to bring:

Weeks 2-4: Keep closing loops

The urgent first week passes, but the organizational work often continues.

- [ ] Keep upcoming appointments visible in one place.
- [ ] Track tests/results still pending and who is responsible for follow-through.
- [ ] Keep referrals, equipment, supply and home-service issues on the open-task list until resolved.
- [ ] When a qualified clinician changes a medication, update the current record used for appointments and family coordination.
- [ ] Do not independently change medication instructions because two lists disagree; contact the appropriate clinician or pharmacist.
- [ ] Revisit whether the family can realistically keep doing the current plan this way.
- [ ] Keep one current family update so another person can step in without reconstructing the story from multiple text threads.

A simple family handoff test

Another person helping should be able to answer these questions.

- [ ] Where are the discharge instructions?
- [ ] Where is the current medication list?
- [ ] What follow-up is scheduled?
- [ ] What is still waiting to be scheduled, delivered or resolved?
- [ ] Who do we call with questions?
- [ ] What did the discharge team tell us to watch for, and what did they tell us to do?
- [ ] Who is handling each open task?

If all of this lives only in one caregiver's head, the system is still fragile.

Notes for the next two weeks

Contacts & notes

Keep the numbers you were given in one place.

Contact	Name / Organization	Phone
Hospital / discharge contact		
Primary care		
Specialist		
Pharmacy		
Home health / home care		
Equipment supplier		
Other		

Additional notes

Important: This checklist is designed to help family caregivers organize information and follow the individualized instructions provided by the health care professionals involved in their family member's care. It is not a substitute for medical advice, diagnosis or treatment.

Developed using: Medicare's *Your Discharge Planning Checklist*; AHRQ's IDEAL Discharge Planning resources; and United Hospital Fund / Next Step in Care hospital-to-home caregiver resources.

Designed with care. Built for Clarity.