


# Mount Sinai

MEDICAL CENTER

## PREPARING FOR YOUR VISIT TO YOUR DOCTOR OR A HOSPITAL



A Guide for  
Patients  
and Families

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# How This Guide Can Help You

Many people have had great visits to doctors, and some have had visits they would like to forget. Across hundreds of doctors' offices that also include hundreds of doctors, nurses, and office staff, there are excellent people and those who could do better. Their online reviews and other in-office reports can confirm these experiences.

The goals of this guide are for you to have outstanding interactions with the people in your health care system, experience positive outcomes from your health care system activities, and be prepared for what comes after each visit — so you can stay as healthy as possible.

This guide should be easy to use, practical, and complete. It can be read through or reviewed by section. Consider keeping it on your shelf or in your online library so you can refer to it as needed for your health care visits or for your family's visits. It is never too early to be well-prepared.



# Your Health Care Notebook

A health care notebook is essentially an organized record of your important health information. It can be stored online or on paper. You should keep it safe and only share it with trusted people and those who need to know. This includes the physicians and nurses who are caring for you when you go to your doctor's office or the hospital. You should review and update it regularly, at least every six months or more if there are major changes in your health or treatments.

## What to Include

- Photo identification
- Insurance information, including copies of the front and back of your cards
- Important contacts, emergency contacts, including your permission for when, who, and how to contact (such as by phone or email):
  - Partners
  - Children
  - Advocates
- Your current health care team with phone number and email:
  - Physicians
  - Nurses
  - Physical therapist
- Medical and surgical history
- Results of latest tests and any major tests
- List of medications and their dosage
- Your preferred pharmacy with phone number
- List of vaccinations with dates
- List of known allergies
- Statement of your health care wishes and goals of care
- Advance care directives (such as a health care proxy and living will)







# Going to Your Doctor Visit

Review this section when you make a doctor's appointment or plan to go to an urgent care center for a simple outpatient visit.

Consider writing these tips down so you are organized and do not forget important information. Use paper, a pad, or your phone. Your MyChart account is an excellent way to keep your medical information in one place, updated and current.

If you have scheduled your visit online or requested the visit using an internet-based system, you may encounter one or both of the following questions when communicating with the office:

- What is the reason for your visit (i.e., your goals)?
- Is this visit for specific problem you are having, or is this a checkup/prevention visit to be sure you are being proactive with your health?

When you visit the doctor, you should be prepared to ask specific questions regarding your health. Remember, your doctor and nurses have allocated a certain amount of time for your visit, so try to limit your questions to less than five (if possible). You want to use the time wisely for all of you. Other questions will surely come up and be added during the visit.

Consider your transportation to and from the visit. Be sure you are well enough to drive and that it is safe for you to do so. If necessary, you may need to have a family member or friend take you to and from the appointment. You can also consider using a cab or ride share if you can travel timely and are not at risk of spreading an infection.

If possible, bring a trusted family member or friend with you to your visit. Having another person hear what is said to you will be very helpful. If you are having difficulty communicating, that person can also serve as your advocate.



If you are going for a **specific problem**, the following are some sample questions your health care team may ask you:

- When did your problem start?
- Is this the first time you experienced the problem, or have there been prior episodes?
- What brings it on?
- What helps relieve the problem?
- Does anyone in your family have anything like this?
- Have you taken any medications for the problem?
- Did you try to evaluate your problem on your own, prior to the visit?
- Did you do online research?
- Have you seen any other clinicians about the problem?
- Have you had any tests in reference to the problem? (If so, try to bring the results with you to the visit.)
- Did you try to manage your problem on your own, prior to the visit?
  - Did you change your diet, exercise, or any other habits?
  - Have you taken any medications?

If you are going for a **prevention visit**, the following are sample questions your health care team may ask you:

- Do you have a family history of any diseases or problems?
- Based on your age, what are specific prevention concerns?

## Questions to Ask

Whether you are going for a **specific problem** or a **prevention visit**, prepare before your visit to ask your own questions (try to limit to five). Remember, your doctor and nurses have allotted a certain amount of time for your visit, so you want to use it wisely. The following are some suggested questions to ask:

- Should I be concerned about any specific diseases?
- Do I need any vaccinations?
- Do I need any screenings for heart and vascular disease, stroke, diabetes, or cancer?
- What are your diet recommendations for me?

- What are your exercise recommendations for me?
- What are your sleep pattern recommendations for me?
- Would I be able to share my goals of care and advance care planning ideas with you?

## What to Bring

Before going to your doctor visit, be sure to organize your health care materials now so you can have them easily available. Be sure you bring the following to your visit:

- Your health care notebook
- Mask and hand sanitizer
- Glasses and hearing aids (if needed)
- Any questions you have prepared (see above)
- Any reports or CDs (if possible) of prior tests or imaging you have had done at a different location
- Paper and pen or an electronic device for taking notes
- Credit card or check or cash for your co-pay or deductible payment

## What Not to Bring

If you are ill, check with your doctor's office in advance to see if you should come into the office or consider a telemedicine visit (if that is appropriate for your problem/condition). Also, be sure to remove any fingernail/toenail polish so your doctor can fully examine your fingers and feet. When going to the visit, be sure not to bring the following:

- Jewelry or any other valuables
- A large computer/laptop
- Pets (unless it is a certified service animal)
- Food or drink, unless you have been instructed that something is necessary
- Many sheets of paper for notes (less than three pages is appropriate); be organized
- More than one person, unless a family meeting is planned or there is a childcare emergency





## What to Take Home

After your doctor visit, be sure to take home the following:

- Notes (these could be your notes or those printed from the doctor's system) and/or follow-up instructions
- Date and time for follow-up or next visit
- A specific plan for any doctor-recommended consultation visits
  - Check to see whether you need referrals and if so, when they will be completed
- An understanding of any upcoming tests (i.e., why you are having them, and when and how you will get your results)
- Connection information for the doctor's online office communication system (if available)
- New prescriptions or suggested dosage changes to your existing medications
- Diet, exercise, or sleep suggestions
- Contact information for your doctor's office if you have any questions or an emergency
- Names of the nurses and assistants who cared for you



# Going to the Hospital or a Testing Location

During or after your doctor visit, you may have to visit a hospital or testing location to take some tests — a blood test, urine test, imaging (e.g., X-ray, ultrasound, CT scan, nuclear scan, or MRI), or testing of a particular area (such as an electrocardiogram for the heart or an electroencephalogram for the brain). Each test has certain criteria and gives you and your doctor specific information about you.



## Questions to Ask

Before taking any test, consider asking a member of your health care team the following:

- What is the purpose of each test, and what is being evaluated?
- Will I need someone to take me to and from the test, or will I be able to drive or take a ride share home or back to work?
- Are there any necessary preparations (such as a special diet and liquids or not eating or drinking or taking pills before and after the test)?
  - Ask for instructions in writing so you have them ahead of time
- Is anything going to be given to me (orally or intravenously) that might have an allergic effect?
- How will I get the results of any tests (e.g., phone, mail, email, or office internet site)?
- When should I expect results?
- Who should I contact if there are problems during or after the test?





## What to Bring

Before going to the hospital or a testing location, be sure you have arranged for transportation to and from your appointment if you will not be able to drive. Your health care notebook includes most of the information you will need to bring with you, but you should at least have the following:

- Photo identification
- Mask and hand sanitizer
- COVID and influenza vaccination record
- Your health insurance information
- List of medications
- List of known allergies
- Any required clothing or shoes you were told to bring or wear for the test

## What Not to Bring

When going to the hospital or a testing location, be sure not to bring the following:

- Jewelry or any other valuables
- A large computer/laptop
- Pets (unless it is a certified service animal)
- Food or drink, unless you have been instructed that something is necessary
- More people than are permitted at the location for assisting you

## What to Take Home

When you leave the hospital or testing location, be sure to take home the following:

- Information on what you can do after the test (such as driving, eating, or taking medication)
- Any exercise or activity restrictions
- List of common signs or symptoms that may occur after the test
- Who to contact if you experience any problems after the test
- Instructions on how you and your clinician will receive your test results
- Names of the doctors, nurses, and technicians who cared for you

# Going to the Emergency Center

If you have an emergency medical concern, you should go to the closest emergency department or in some cases, an urgent care center. Emergency medicine can be lifesaving and prevent long-term problems after a sudden occurrence. Symptoms such as the sudden onset of a very severe headache, chest pain, shortness of breath, unusual or excessive bleeding, or inability to speak or move an arm or leg usually mean you should go for emergency evaluation immediately.

If there is time or if there is someone with you, call your primary care physician to alert them of the sudden change, the concern, and what emergency center you plan to visit. Your physician or the covering physician should come into the emergency department to see you or call the physicians at the emergency center to inform them you are coming. Your doctor should also let them know what the problem is and any important information about your medical history.



## Questions to Ask

Before going to an emergency center, consider the following questions:

- Which emergency center should I go to? (This should be based on your condition and the expertise of the physicians and nurses at the emergency center.)
- Should I go by ambulance or be driven? (This is based on your clinical condition and who is with you.)
- Do I have what I need with me? (This is why it is good to have your health care notebook prepared in advance and ready to go.)
- Do I have time to alert my doctor and any other family members or friends?



## What to Bring

When going to the emergency center, be sure to wear comfortable clothes. Your health care notebook includes most of the information you will need to bring with you, but you should at least have the following:

- Photo identification
- Mask and hand sanitizer
- Your health insurance information
- Paper and pen or an electronic device for taking notes
- List of any medications taken in the last 24 hours
- List of known allergies
- Someone who can help you share and communicate information with your primary care physician

## What Not to Bring

When going to the emergency center, you may end up having tests and moving around to various locations within the hospital. Be sure not to bring the following:

- Jewelry or any other valuables
- A large computer/laptop
- Pets (unless it is a certified service animal)
- Food or drink
- Anything that should not be misplaced or lost

## What to Take Home

When you leave the emergency center, be sure to take home the following:

- Instructions for next steps in your care (such as what to do if you do not get better or get worse, or if you need future tests or doctor visits)
- Test results or instructions on how to get them
- Contact information if you have questions or another emergency
- New prescriptions, including information on what they are for, where to get them filled, and how to take them
- Names of the doctors, nurses, and technicians who cared for you



# Going to the Hospital for a Planned Admission

If you are going to the hospital to be admitted for a test or a procedure, you should be prepared. Make sure you have the necessary information about you, your medical and surgical history, your conditions, and your treatments organized and readily available. You should also be sure why you are going to the hospital and know who your advocate will be, whether this is your physician, a family member, a hired assistant, or a friend.

## Questions to Ask

Before a planned hospital admission, consider the following questions:

- Why am I going into the hospital?
- Where can visitors park?
- Where do I go to check in?
- Once there, what room will I be in so I can alert my family?
- What do I need to do to prepare?
  - What and when can I eat or drink, and when (if possible) can I take my existing medications?
  - Should I do or not do any exercise or activities in advance of the hospitalization?
- How long will I be in the hospital?
- Will I need any additional accommodations when I return home?

## What to Bring

When going to the hospital for a planned admission, be sure to wear comfortable clothes. Your health care notebook includes most of the information you will need to bring with you, but you should at least have the following:

- Photo identification
- Mask and hand sanitizer

- Glasses and hearing aids (if needed)
- Your health insurance information
- Paper and pen or an electronic device for taking notes
- List of any medications taken in the last 24 hours
- List of known allergies
- Mobile phone and charger
- Clothes suitable for your stay
- Reading materials (if appropriate for your hospitalization)
- Safe and proper storage for added essentials (such as dentures or any artificial limbs)

## What Not to Bring

Before a planned hospital admission, be sure to remove any fingernail/toenail polish and avoid bringing the following:

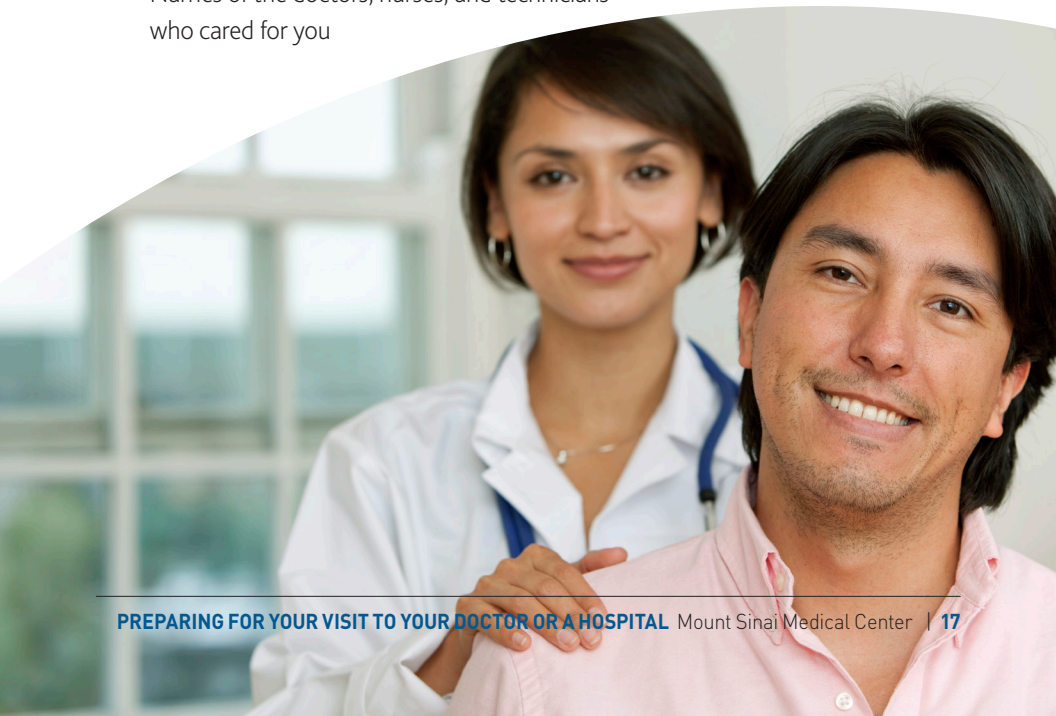
- Jewelry or any other valuables
- A large computer/laptop
- Pets (unless it is a certified service animal)
- Food or drink at the time of admission
  - This might be permitted if you are hospitalized for several days
- More clothes than are necessary for your stay
- Cosmetics
- Medications

## What to Take Home

After your planned hospital admission, be sure to take home the following:

- Anything you brought to the hospital (such as your phone, charger, clothes, etc.)
- Notes (these could be your notes or those printed from the hospital's system) and/or follow-up instructions
- Your health care notebook (if you brought it with you)
  - Update after your hospitalization if there are changes in diagnosis, procedures, test results, or therapies
  - Add your discharge summary materials

- New prescriptions, including information on what they are for, where to get them filled, and how to take them; and include any suggested dosage changes to your existing medications
- Activity recommendations
  - Activities to avoid (such as sexual activity, exercise, driving, or returning to work)
  - Activities to add
- Diet recommendations
  - Items to add to your diet
  - Items to avoid or limit
- Follow-up doctor visits
  - Name of doctor
  - Dates
- Contact information for urgent questions
- List of signs or symptoms to watch for or be concerned about
  - Pain
  - Bleeding
  - Fever
  - Breathing changes
  - Mental or physical function changes
- Names of the doctors, nurses, and technicians who cared for you





# Who to Ask For Help

Interacting with your doctor or nurses should not be difficult. Your relationship with your clinicians should be good — where they are pleased they are helping you, and you are pleased you are being helped to reach your full health potential as best you can.

Proper communication is the key ingredient for an excellent outcome. We hope this guide helps you — and helps keep you healthy. However, we realize all is not perfect and there are times when communication does not lead to good interactions. When you are not able to communicate in a way that helps you get what you need, who can you ask for help?

Start with a family member. Ask if there is anything you could do better. A friend might also be able to provide input on how you can improve your communication. That family member or friend might also be able to intercede as an advocate.

If it is appropriate, talk directly with your doctor about your concerns. Doctors want to have good, positive interactions with each patient. A member of your doctor's staff, such as a nurse, assistant, or office manager, may also be able to help answer questions or improve communication.

In each hospital setting, including testing locations, emergency departments, and inpatient units, there are department managers or nurse managers who should be able to assist you with questions and information. If those people are not able to assist, there are supervisors for all doctors and nurses. You can reach out to them if needed.





# What to Do After a Visit

Whether you visit your doctor, a hospital, or a testing location, the following are the most important activities to make sure you handle:

- Be sure of any follow-up appointments or your communication plan
- Fill any new prescriptions and begin taking them — or make suggested dosage changes to your existing medications
- Be sure you are connected to your doctor or hospital's electronic communication system
- Adjust your diet, exercise, or sleep as suggested
- Share any changes you are making with your family or loved ones
- Write down any changes that you notice with your health
- Update your health care notebook with any changes in your diagnosis, procedures, test results, or therapies
- Start a new list of questions for your next doctor visit
- Be sure you have results of all tests

Hopefully, you have found this information very helpful. Let us know what you think and give us suggestions on how to improve it for all patients. Take good care of yourself and stay well!



# Robert C. Goldszer, MD, MBA

Dr. Goldszer is currently senior vice president and chief medical officer at Mount Sinai Medical Center in Miami Beach. His focus is on quality of patient care, education, and innovative research. Dr. Goldszer is one of the executive sponsors of many quality improvement programs and electronic health records at the medical center. Dr. Goldszer is also responsible for overseeing the physician teaching programs at Mount Sinai. From 1979 to 2008, Dr. Goldszer was a full-time faculty member at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, where he was responsible for several quality improvement programs.



Dr. Goldszer holds an appointment as clinical professor of medicine at Florida International University College of Medicine, Miami, and is a voluntary professor of medicine at University of Miami. He earned a Bachelor of Arts in history from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1972, received his medical degree and internal medicine residency training from Drexel/Hahnemann University in Philadelphia in 1979, and completed his renal fellowship at the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital in Boston in 1982. In June 1999, he received his Master of Business Administration from Boston University's Executive MBA Program and was elected to membership in Beta Gamma Sigma National Honor Society for business students.



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