

GOING TO THE HOSPITAL

WHAT TO EXPECT

Sooner or later, if you live long enough, you're either going to be in a hospital as a patient, or go through a hospital experience with a loved one. You or your loved one may be seriously ill, have surgery, or maybe an accident with severe injuries. In addition to the physical trauma associated with these types of experiences, there also can be emotional trauma: anxiety and depression. Jesus tells us that in this world we are going to experience trouble (John 16:33). He tells us these things so we can be ready and be prepared. He also tells us that He has overcome the world and that we can too, through trusting in Him. This article is about getting ready, being prepared, encouraging, overcoming, and trusting.

A hospital visit is a one of the side effects of longevity; it's both good news and bad all in the same phrase. The good news is they can do miraculous things to help you get well. The bad news is that hospitals can be a frustrating, nerve racking, and confusing (if not painful and undignified) experience. During these experiences it is difficult to stay focused on the good things, the blessings in your life: the amazing expertise/knowledge of Doctors, the availability/affordability of treatments, the support of friends/family, and, of course, your relationship with the Lord. It is difficult to remember that we are an intentional part of God's world, that we have a role to play on His planet: "For I know the and a future. You will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me..." (Jeremiah 29:11-13). God's plan for us: To make the world a better place by showing the love of Christ in what we do and who we are.

Whether you arrive at the hospital through the emergency room or through pre-op, you are starting a journey through a system that is hard to understand, not always attentive, and sometimes frightening. But, it is a great system when you understand and use it effectively. It is a system that passes out miracles. The system works best and the miracles are greatest when you do your homework and partner with your doctor(s). But, how do we do that and what elements of our situation should we research and address?

Let's explore the following issues/events in medical care:

A VISIT TO THE DOCTOR'S OFFICE – A prayer before

- Be first in line. Schedule your appt for the first thing in the morning, or afternoon
- Keep a note pad with a list of questions
- Take the pad with you and write down what the Dr. says
- If you're concerned about it...ask
- If you think you need something...ask
- Take a book/magazine to read
- Don't go by yourself, unless there is no other way
- Dress comfortably with clothes that are easy to remove
- If you have not been to the office before, call ahead so you will know where the building/office/entrance is
- Use the valet, or get dropped off at the door
- Plan a meal afterwards
- A prayer after

THE DIAGNOSIS – Praise God if it's good. Praise God if it's bad.

Bad news is never fun and never easy. There are so many questions:

“I’ve done all the right things: No smoking, no drinking, no dancing, no spitting, so what went wrong? Is there a purpose in all of this?” “Lord, what are You telling me?” “Am I going to be strong enough to get through this?” “How do I keep this from happening again and what about the money, the job, and the family?” There are so many arrangements and so many things to figure out. “How am I ever going to get through this?”

More often than not, you will be looking at a sleepless night or two. Managing your sanity during this period can be a challenge, especially if the diagnosis is potentially life threatening. This is a really good time to remember those things about God’s love for you: What He has done, His mercy in forgiving you. Pray for: peace, understanding, encouragement and wisdom. Find/list your blessings and praise God for them.

RESOURCES FOR MEDICAL INFORMATION

If you are to understand the possibilities and explore all your options, you need to be a key part of the process. Asking the right questions is critical and will lead you to informed possibilities and options. Never make medical decisions without your doctor(s). It’s incredible what they know. Use the following resources to help frame your questions.

- Google – Go to www.google.com/ and type the name of the illness or the type of injury
- www.mayoclinic.com An excellent medical website
- www.webmd.com This website is a medical information resource that can be helpful but also make you dangerous, frustrated, nervous, and unnecessarily tired. Remember, your Doctor is your most reliable and complete source of information.
- www.about.com is a symptom checker website.
- www.medical.nettop20.com The 20 best sites for medical and health information.
- www.health.usnews.com Click on best hospitals and select the category. Unfortunately Texas only has two hospitals listed currently.
- www.consumerreports.org/health/doctors/hospitals Subscription required, but is very reasonable for what you get. Information excellent. Good articles. Also has information on doctors.
- www.aarp.org/bulletin At times this site will be useful and at other times, not.
- www.stophospitalinfections.org This is a Consumers Union. Interesting information.
- www.cdc.gov/hai Good information about infections & infection control.

Mortality rates are available for several conditions/procedures. They are compiled by the Texas Department of State Health Services, Texas Health Care Information Collection Center of Health Statistics. You can access data by geographic area and identifying one of 19 conditions/procedures included in their studies. Google “thcic/publications/hospitals.” This information is primarily useful in comparing the volume of specific procedures performed by your selected hospital. The higher the volume, the more experience the hospital has in dealing with that particular type of medical issue. (A lower mortality rate is preferable.)

If you choose to do research in this manner, please be aware that there are problems with methodologies that you will need to discuss with your doctor. Some hospitals may have a higher mortality rate because they have the experts and attract the harder more complex patients/cases. Also note that some of the information in the studies may be out of date. Be sure and check.

There are actual films of many surgeries that may be viewed over the internet. Ask your doctors about these. You may not want to get that deeply involved with medical/treatment processes for your illness or injury.

Fear and doubt can be set aside by a better understanding of your illness/injury. Fear and doubt can also be set aside by prayer, by reading God’s Word and by praising/worshipping each day. God is there with you and He is there for you. He will never leave you or forsake you. “Call on me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.” (Jeremiah 33:3)

The above is recommended only to help you frame questions and make decisions. Your doctor should be involved with any medical decision you make.

PRE-OP CONSIDERATIONS

- Do your homework, research. See above
- Understand your insurance: deductibles, exclusions, coverage, etc.

IMPORTANT: *Make sure that all physicians, technicians and medical entities and facilities involved with your treatment are approved by your insurance because you are going to sign a document stating that you will be responsible for all charges/costs. Be careful and if there are doubts, ask them to put it in writing.*

- Getting a second opinion if you are uncomfortable with the first. Don't be afraid to contact other specialists.
- Look for high volume hospitals and doctors for your particular surgical procedure
- Research infection rates for your selected hospital. Talk with your doctor about these.
- Look for reports on your doctor
- Feel comfortable with your doctor
- Get your questions answered to your satisfaction
- Be involved/engaged with your care o Legal prep: Last Will and Testament, Living Will, Do Not Resuscitate (DNR), Medical Power of Attorney, Durable Power of Attorney
- Prepare a Medical Log: a way to help you track taking your meds
- Pack with things you will want to wear and things you will need (toothbrush, combs, hearing aid batteries, etc.)

INFECTIONS

- Pay attention to what you touch, keep hands away from your face.
- Bathe with antibiotic soap (4% chlorhexidine) and wash with it for 2 or 3 days prior to surgery.
- Ask your doctor about taking an antibiotic before surgery. This is not a simple issue and your doctor may well be against this.
- Limit exposure to family and friends to prevent acquiring an illness immediately prior to surgery.
- Learn procedures for changing dressings, using PICC lines, catheters, etc.
- Don't assume all hospital employees follow correct procedures.

GOING TO THE HOSPITAL

If you are scheduled or aware that a trip to the hospital may occur in the near future, you may want to pack a sports bag/suitcase and include the following: If an emergency arises, the bag should be readily accessible and complete. Pack an overnight/sports bag with the following and keep it handy. You may want to include additional items not listed.

- Contact phone numbers for doctors, family and friends
- List of current meds taken showing dosages and frequencies
- Legal paperwork: Medical/Durable Power of Atty, DNR if appropriate, Living Will, copy of Drivers License,, copy of Medicare/drug cards, supplemental insurance card (Your SS# will be on your Medicare card.)
- Medical history - you may want to talk with your doctor about this
- Bag for paperwork, pen/pencil, calendar
- Hearing aid batteries
- Book(s), magazines, crossword puzzles, etc
- Clothes/underwear as appropriate

REPORTING FOR SURGERY

- The hospital probably will ask you to check in early. Some will allow you to preregister. This cuts about half an hour out of the process.
- It generally will be an hour to two hours before surgery starts. They are rarely on time.
- It is during this time that you will receive a drafty new outfit and be connected to monitors, IVs, etc.

- Don't be upset when the staff asks you about allergies, what you are having done, where they are going to do it, your name, your birthday, when you last ate/drank, and etc., over and over again. They are doing that to protect you so that there are no mistakes.
- You will also have to sign a lot of legal documents.
- You will, in all probability, speak with several doctors and several nurses who will answer any of your questions about their procedures.

AFTER SURGERY AND DURING RECOVERY – Encouragement, Pain/Comfort, Healing

- **Being/having an Encourager or an Advocate is very important.**
 - An encourager (spouse, friend, adult child, etc.) will help you count your blessings and remember your accomplishments.
 - Look for and point out positive physical signs: color, alertness, feeling better, warm hands and feet, etc.
 - Know that flowers lift the spirit.
 - Good news from home or office brings peace with a sense that all is well.
 - Laugh, touch, talk (listen) are so important in helping people get well.
 - Having an advocate that stays with you in the hospital is very important when it comes to the administration of medicines. The right pill at the right time will get you home sooner. Sometimes things can get sloppy and mistakes are made. The statistics are astonishing. Don't allow your loved one to become one of them!
- **Pain**
 - Stay ahead of pain. You will rest better and heal faster!
 - The pump is a pain. You may need someone to stay with you; someone who can stay awake and remember to press the button.
Ask your doctor about other options if the pump does not work for you.
 - Sometimes there are problems – nausea, itching, rashes, etc. Work out a plan with your doctor to handle allergic reactions. If you are uncomfortable with your doctor's approach to pain management, ask to be referred to a Pain Management Doctor. Today, there are new, more effective drugs on the market; drugs that no longer produce the uncomfortable side effects and allergic reactions listed above. There are also drugs that handle those side effects should they occur.
 - Don't worry about becoming an addict (Abuse of painkillers usually entails
 - 1) taking more than recommended
 - 2) taking them when you are not uncomfortable
 - 3) taking them to reduce anxiety or feeling "stressed out about everything.")
 - Take Tylenol or aspirin if that solves the problem. TV, friends/family, books, or music may help you take your mind off pain. **Note:** *Aspirin is a blood thinner. Consult your physician before using.*
 - Pain is stressful causing increases in blood pressure, heart rate, stress hormones, cholesterol, and etc. Controlling pain promotes healing and early graduation (from the hospital).
- **Comfort**
 - Diversions are important during your recovery: DVDs, books, TV, Journaling, Motivational CDs, Visitors.
 - You may need extra blankets to keep warm after surgery. Ask and be comfortable.
 - If something irritates you (light, no light, snoring, noises, etc.) make a change. It is important that you are comfortable and rest well. The more rest, the faster you heal/recover.
 - Many complain of not being able to sleep in the hospital. You will heal faster, be more comfortable, and experience fewer frustrations if you get rest. Ask your doctor for a sleeping pill if you are not able to sleep at night, or get back to sleep after an interruption. There are non-narcotic options; Benadryl being pretty popular. Nap as much as possible. Focus on relaxing and pray for healing. Speak with your doctor about these things.
 - Release from the Hospital
 - Know that procedures governing your stay and discharge from the hospital are changing
 - You may be given notice of your discharge and advised of methods of appeal. Ask your case/social worker for additional information.

EMOTIONAL ISSUES – How in the world will I ever get through this?

It is normal to be afraid regarding any number of issues surrounding serious illnesses, injuries, and surgeries. “Will I survive?” “Am I going to die?” “What is the remainder of my life going to be like?” “How much pain will I have to endure?” “Will I be a burden to my loved ones?” “How dependent am I going to be on others?” Feelings of frustration, uncertainty, grief (for the loss of your lifestyle) and even depression are often encountered during these times.

Oddly enough this is a perfect time to remember who you are and where your strength comes from. When the Lord is your Shepherd, you can walk through the Valley without being scared to death. Lift up your eyes, your help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.

If you are depressed, ask your doctor for help. If you have no energy, lost your appetite, can't sleep, can't seem to focus or keep track of your thoughts, you may be depressed. If you avoid social contacts, have feelings of helplessness or hopelessness, see your doctor. You don't have to live like this. Know that depression is common with serious health issues, e.g., strokes, heart attacks, serious illness, and after surgery. And too, depression can increase the risk of dying.

Guard and be aware of your attitude. The people in the hospital that get the most attention and receive the best care are the people with the great attitudes. The hospital staff will be drawn to you, which will give you a great opportunity to explain who you are and whose you are and why you are like you are.

THERAPY AND REHABILITATION

- Often surgery along with inactivity results in stiffness and/or weakness which will require therapy to bring us back to where we were. Your doctor and other medical professionals can help define your needs, set goals, create therapy routines, and select the right rehab center. There, a program will be designed and a schedule/goals set which will facilitate your complete recovery. It is important that you regain your strength, so you can take care of yourself when you return home.
- **Note:** For every one day of sickness, it takes at least 2 days to recover.
- Often the cost of rehabilitation will be borne by Medicare if your stay in the hospital is at least through 3 midnights.
- It is important that you follow the routines that they outline. It may hurt and it may make you tired, but it will get you well
- Therapy can be very hard, especially if you are heavily medicated. Some rehab centers are better at this than others.
- Medicare will pay for therapy as long as you are making progress for up to 100 days. When you stop, they stop.
- Exercise/physical activity is very important and not just for your muscles. The older you are, the more important it becomes, so plan to continue your exercises/physical activities once you get home.
- Home Health Care
- Under Home Health Care, nurses, therapists, aides, social services personnel, and others can come to your house to counsel, do therapy, run tests, and perform medical treatments.
- When meeting with these folks, it is best to take notes. Sometimes instructions get complicated and lengthy.
- Home Health Care personnel also can counsel safety and do home evaluations.
- Dieticians also visit
- Medicare usually covers Home Health Care.

MEDICATIONS

- Medicines – you may need a system. You will not be at your sharpest after surgery.
- If you know you are going to need help, make sure someone oversees your meds.
- There are any number of pill boxes/special containers that may be helpful.
- Sort by AM and PM and day of the week as appropriate.
- Make a cheat sheet and post them about.
- Keep a medication log/journal as well as track your Doctor's visits. Don't allow yourself to be interrupted when taking and recording meds.

CHANGING YOUR HABITS/PLANS ... rather than your Identity

Aging and the problems of aging can change the way you and others look at yourself. For example, “I am no longer a runner, or race dirt bikes. I am a Grandpa and someone who spends a lot of time in doctor’s offices. An adventure used to be a day at the races, but now it’s going down stairs, wearing bifocals, and not holding on to the handrail.”

A heart attack or a stroke dramatically can change the way you look at yourself. What is important here is that you recognize that you are changing plans and habits, not your identity. You are a child of God and are here to do “good works.” That hasn’t changed since the day you were born and will not change until the day you die.

WHY DO CHRISTIANS fare better before, during, and after surgery?

It occurs to me that being a Christian has a ton of advantages:

- Strength and understanding from God’s Spirit
- Being in a win/win situation (if you recover you win, if you don’t you win)
- Trusting God and knowing that He is in control
- Less worry/anxiety and more confidence/peace
- Feeling God’s presence in our lives which brings us joy
- Christian brothers and sisters praying for us and coming to see us to encourage us
- Meals, errands, cards, notes, Prayer Shawls, etc.

HOW DO I BECOME A CHRISTIAN?

You may find it helpful to view the answer to this question at this website: <http://www.theheights.org/share/>

You’re not here by accident. God loves you. He wants you to have a personal relationship with Him through Jesus, His Son. There is just one thing that separates you from God. That one thing is sin.

The Bible describes sin in many ways. Most simply, sin is our failure to measure up to God’s holiness and His righteous standards. We sin by things we do, choices we make, attitudes we show, and thoughts we entertain. We also sin when we fail to do right things. The Bible affirms our own experience - “there is none righteous, not even one.” No matter how good we try to be, none of us does right things all the time.

People tend to divide themselves into groups - good people and bad people. But God says that every person who has ever lived is a sinner, and that any sin separates us from God. No matter how we might classify ourselves, this includes you and me. We are all sinners.

“For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” Romans 3:23

Many people are confused about the way to God. Some think they will be punished or rewarded according to how good they are. Some think they should make things right in their lives before they try to come to God. Others find it hard to understand how Jesus could love them when other people don’t seem to. But I have great news for you! God DOES love you! More than you can ever imagine! And there’s nothing you can do to make Him stop! Yes, our sins demand punishment - the punishment of death and separation from God. But, because of His great love, God sent His only Son Jesus to die for our sins.

“God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Romans 5:8

For you to come to God you have to get rid of your sin problem. But, in our own strength, not one of us can do this! You can’t make yourself right with God by being a better person. Only God can rescue us from our sins. He is willing to do this not because of anything you can offer Him, but JUST BECAUSE HE LOVES YOU!

“He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy.” Titus 3:5

It's God's grace that allows you to come to Him - not your efforts to "clean up your life" or work your way to Heaven. You can't earn it. It's a free gift.

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast." Ephesians 2:8-9

For you to come to God, the penalty for your sin must be paid. God's gift to you is His son, Jesus, who paid the debt for you when He died on the Cross.

"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord." Romans 6:23

Jesus paid the price for your sin and mine by giving His life on a cross at a place called Calvary, just outside of the city walls of Jerusalem in ancient Israel. God brought Jesus back from the dead. He provided the way for you to have a personal relationship with Him through Jesus. When we realize how deeply our sin grieves the heart of God and how desperately we need a Savior, we are ready to receive God's offer of salvation. To admit we are sinners means turning away from our sin and selfishness and turning to follow Jesus. The Bible word for this is "repentance" - to change our thinking about how grievous sin is, so our thinking is in line with God's.

All that's left for you to do is to accept the gift that Jesus is holding out for you right now.

"If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved." Romans 10:9-10

God says that if you believe in His son, Jesus, you can live forever with Him in glory.

"For God so loved the world that He gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life." John 3:16

Are you ready to accept the gift of eternal life that Jesus is offering you right now? Let's review what this commitment involves:

- I acknowledge I am a sinner in need of a Savior - this is to repent or turn away from sin
- I believe in my heart that God raised Jesus from the dead - this is to trust that Jesus paid the full penalty for my sins
- I confess Jesus as my Lord and my God - this is to surrender control of my life to Jesus
- I receive Jesus as my Savior forever - this is to accept that God has done *for* me and *in* me what He promised

If it is your sincere desire to receive Jesus into your heart as your personal Lord and Savior, then talk to God from your heart:



HERE'S A SUGGESTED PRAYER:

"Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner and I do not deserve eternal life. But, I believe You died and rose from the grave to make me a new creation and to prepare me to dwell in your presence forever. Jesus, come into my life, take control of my life, forgive my sins and save me. I am now placing my trust in You alone for my salvation and I accept your free gift of eternal life."

If you have trusted Jesus as your Lord and Savior, please let us know. We want to rejoice in what God has done in your life and help you to grow spiritually. If you have questions or concerns you would like help with, please call or write and let us know. We're here to help you understand the love that Jesus is offering you for free, no matter who or where you are. Email us at ipalmer@theheights.org, call 972-238-7243, or write to us at:

The Heights Baptist Church

- Attn: John Palmer
201 West Renner Road
Richardson, TX 75080

GETTING BACK TO NORMAL

- **Getting back to your life**
 - Normal: So just what is normal? Since you were a young adult, things have always been about the same. But, not with Senior Adults and not with major surgery. What is today...is not what was yesterday. Normal can be illusive, a moving target.
 - What things have changed? I know what I can't do, so what can I do? The most important things in life: Be an encourager, prayer warrior, caregiver, supporter, peacemaker...you get the idea. Count your blessings and establish new goals. It's just change.
- **Getting outside SPACING ISSUE**
 - Get outdoors when you can; it's therapeutic. The natural sounds and sensations of the outside are very peaceful.
 - Get out to the store, the park, or just around the block. Re-engage the world.
 - Establish new routines as soon as possible.
- **Nutrition and eating SPACING ISSUE**
 - You probably won't have much of an appetite after surgery. Some of it, no doubt, will be from the anesthesia and some from the shock/trauma.
 - Fear of the impact of food on arteries if you are a heart patient, on digestive system if you had problems with your intestines, pain from oral surgeries, but you need the calories and nutrition.
 - You may need to stay away from things that create/cause gas, things that cause acid reflux, spicy stuff, things that are full of fat, and perhaps coffee and chocolate. Read the labels!
 - You may want to eat small amounts frequently, maybe lots of liquids, so called comfort foods (mac and cheese, mashed potatoes, oatmeal/grits, scrambled eggs), casseroles, /soups. Rest before and after meals. Follow your doctor's instructions.
 - There are over 75,000 websites containing recipes for healing/comfort foods for recovery from disease, treatment and/or surgery. Plus there are all kinds of information on nutrition, content, and what different foods do for different parts of the body.
 - After major surgery, many recommend cutting back on salt, sugar, processed foods, spices, and fatty foods.
 - Be careful not to get too constipated. That can be dangerous. Talk with your Doctor.
- **Recuperation - Nutrition and Pain Management. SPACING ISSUE**
 - There are a lot of good OTC pain killers and supplements on the market today to insure that you are getting all you need to recover and heal. Aleve, aspirin (make sure these are OK with your Doctor because they are blood thinners) and Tylenol work to help you control pain that may be keeping you from maximizing your rehabilitation. Coenzyme Q10 (CoQ10), a good multivitamin (with minerals), fish oil, Resveratrol and Pycnogenol increase your energy and help in the healing process. These lower blood pressure, reduce blood clots, reduce bad cholesterol, and increase good cholesterol, etc.
 - Again, your doctor should guide you in selecting a course of action for nutrition and pain management. These are just ideas for you to explore with your Doctor.

Being sick, having surgery and recovering from surgery are not the most pleasant of life's experiences, but they can bless you in ways not imagined. It's important during these times of challenge that you look for blessings and thank God for being in His hands. Be at peace. Blessings.