

# Care where you're living or staying

A Jewish Care Interact Guide

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### Homecare services

As you or your relative get older, you may find that you need some support and assistance in order to continue living independently in your own home. You may also need support, perhaps on a temporary basis, if you have recently been in hospital.

#### What is homecare?

Homecare services (also known as domiciliary care) provide carers who will help you with personal care. The type of services they offer include:

- getting out of bed in the morning and getting settled in the evening;
- helping with washing, using the toilet and dressing;
- collecting prescriptions and giving medication;
- providing nursing care (from a registered nurse);
- preparing meals;
- collecting pensions; and
- offering supervision and companionship.

(Please note that the services described here may be different if you live in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland.)

The level and amount of care will depend on your circumstances. Some people will need full-time care from a live-in carer or from a number of carers who visit at different times. For others, a regular visit once a day or a few times a week may be sufficient.

#### The Care Needs Assessment

The first step in arranging homecare is to ask your local authority for a Care Needs Assessment. Everyone is entitled to this; it is free of charge and will give a professional assessment of the type of care which will be most appropriate. [You can Find your local council on the GOV.UK website](#). And for information on [Getting a care needs assessment, visit the Which? Elderly Care website](#).

#### Financing homecare

If the assessment shows that you are in need of care you will also be means tested to see how much you can afford to pay for the service and how much the local authority will pay towards it.

#### Local authority funding

If the local authority agrees to pay for—or make a contribution towards—the care, it will then allocate a Personal Budget. This is the amount of money the local authority will contribute towards your support.

You can then decide how you receive the payments and what services they will be spent on. Full information about receiving and using the budget is available on the following websites:

- [Which? Elderly Care's page, Getting local authority funding for care at home](#)
- [Age UK's site, Making care personalised](#)

## NHS funding

There are two types of NHS funding that may apply if you need homecare.

**NHS continuing care** is available if you have ongoing needs as a result of a disability, accident or illness. Your eligibility for this type of care is not means tested and will be based on an assessment carried out by two or more healthcare professionals. To find out more, [visit the Continuing healthcare section of the NHS website](#).

**NHS intermediate care** provides free temporary care at home for six weeks following a stay in hospital; it can also enable you to stay at home following an emergency breakdown with existing care services.

## Funding your own care

If you do not qualify for local authority funding or you want care over and above what the authority has agreed, you will need to pay for this yourself.

The following websites include information on ways of raising the cash to pay for your own care:

- [Money Advice Service's website section on Self-funding your long-term care](#)
- [Paying for care in your own home from the Housing Care website](#)
- [Self-funding care at home from the Which? Elderly Care website](#)

## Arranging homecare

There are a number of ways in which you can get the care you need to help you live independently:

- Private homecare agencies may employ carers and will manage them for you in return for a fee. They may also introduce you to a carer who you will employ and pay direct. If you employ a carer directly, you will need to draw up a contract of employment and may be obliged to contribute to a pension.
- Non-profit organisations offer low-cost or free care services.
- Family, friends and neighbours may be able to offer you some support on a regular or ad hoc basis.

For more information about arranging Homecare, visit the following websites:

- [How to find the help you need at home, from Age UK](#)
- [The Community Support and Social Work team at Jewish Care](#)
- [The UK Homecare Association](#)
- [Support at home, from the Royal Voluntary Service](#)

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## Interview tips: 10 questions to ask a future carer

Finding the right carer can be a long process. But since it's so important to your overall health and wellbeing, you should try not to take any shortcuts.

One way to make the process a bit easier is to come up with some questions to ask during the interview. By preparing in advance, you'll be able to get the conversation started while making sure you find out the essential facts about your future carer.

## Interview basics

Here are 10 suggested questions that can help you get started:

1. Where are you from?
2. How long have you been working in care?
3. What experience do you have?
4. What certification or training do you have?
5. What are your interests?
6. Do you like talking?
7. Do you smoke?
8. If your client is not well (or if there is an emergency), what would you do?
9. Do you know how to cook?
10. Do you drive? If so, how long have you been driving?

## Additional resources

The following links may provide ideas for more questions for you to ask:

- [Choosing care: Interview questions for hiring a paid carer](#)
- [Employing personal assistants: A toolkit to help you employ your own personal assistants](#)
- [Four questions to ask a new live-in carer to start building a relationship](#)
- [What questions should I ask a homecare provider?](#)

It is really helpful to get a lot of information about the people who apply—before you narrow down your choices. Try to pick a couple of people, and then decide who is the right person for the job based on how the candidate answers your questions—and how well you connect during the process.

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## Simplifying where you live

As time passes, you may start to rethink your living accommodation. In your early adult years, your focus may be on accumulating possessions and working hard to increase your living space. You may dream of owning a big house and furnishing it with modern gadgets, fashionable furniture and so on.

Over the years, you might decide you don't need as much space anymore. Other things might offer you more satisfaction, and your focus will shift. For instance, you may have plans to start Ageing well and living with purpose or you might want to move to a community with certain support services. It's all part of the way priorities change and life goes on.

## Weighing the benefits

Moving to a smaller home (also known as downsizing) could help transform your dreams into a reality.

Consider these benefits:

**Save money.** Retirement from work (or even simply reducing working hours) can have a huge impact on the lifestyle you can afford. At this stage of life, it may be even more important to consider any opportunities to save money, which could help cover costs for future care needs or even contribute towards an eventual move to an assisted living environment. (If you are considering assisted living as a downsizing option, take a look at our overview of Independent living and supported accommodation, where you'll find information and resources to guide you through this important transition.)

**Reduce maintenance.** Do you really want to keep up the maintenance of a house with several bedrooms when most of the time, you only use one? If your current home has an old heating system, do you want to keep spending a small fortune keeping it comfortable over the winter months? Moving into a more modern property—ideally with an efficient heating system, effective insulation and a smaller footprint—is a strategy that will make sense over time.

**Make access easier.** Do you have the energy to climb stairs every day or take care of a long, uneven driveway? These obstacles can make it difficult for you (or anyone with mobility concerns) to access your home. You may require additional help to get around more easily. Fitting a stair lift or adapting furniture that better suits your needs could be a solution, but moving might be a more practical idea. You could consider a bungalow on one level or a serviced apartment block that provides maintenance. These are really appealing if you'd rather not take care of things like driveways, stairwells and other shared areas.

**Upgrade important living areas.** A more compact kitchen will require less cleaning, and modern and efficient appliances can help save you money. A bathroom with a large shower unit will make it easier to fit safety rails and other support fixtures where needed.

As you do your research, you may uncover some hidden costs. You should think about these expenses before making your decision to move.

For instance, you may need to make some basic refurbishments in order to sell your current home. Many cosmetic touch ups can be inexpensive (like repainting walls, cleaning carpets, replacing kitchen cabinets or fixing defective bathroom fixtures), but this all adds up fairly quickly. Think about this. Is it a better investment to update where you already live or to move house completely? If your current property is old and your checklist of repairs means you'll end up replacing the heating system, doing structural work and fixing an entire kitchen or bathroom suite, it will most probably be more economically viable to sell up and move to a property that has all new fixtures and fittings. However, if just one of these things is required in order to make your home comfortable (and the size of your property is still manageable), it may be cheaper to complete that specific project and stay where you are. Keep in mind you may need to make some adjustments to a new property, and these costs should be considered on top of those you'll have to make in order to sell your current home.

If you do decide to sell your home, make sure to ask for help. Get advice from friends, family

members and professionals (such as your local estate agents) when weighing your options. This is important for buying a new property, selling your current one and making any decisions on negotiating prices.

### Not ready to move? Just declutter!

If you do not feel that moving to a new house is right at this stage and decide to invest in minor repairs instead, try to consider what you really need where you currently live. The whole process of decluttering can be therapeutic because it creates space and clarity, not just on a physical and practical level, but on a psychological level too.

Decluttering can:

- **Make your home safer.** Lots of useless objects lying around the house can make it very difficult to navigate your way around them. When you open a kitchen cabinet or bedroom wardrobe, are items just waiting to topple out? Or are you regularly tripping over an old rug with turned up corners, or bumping into a dining table that's just too large for your current needs? Decluttering might help.
- **Feel therapeutic.** Decluttering is a great way to remember exactly what you own. Perhaps you have a towering stack of mystery boxes stored in your loft, or multiple sets of dinner plates, cutlery and wine glasses. Whatever you don't want can be passed along to someone who can really use it.
- **Help you decide what's really important to you.** Once you know exactly what you have, decide which items still hold purpose and meaning. The rest you can donate to charity or give it to other family members.
- **Assist you financially.** If you are able to sell some of the items you want to get rid of, this money could go towards investing in some new fixtures (such as a stair lift or a new armchair) that you might make your home better suited to your current needs. Keep in mind that luxury items (such as a car you never seem to drive anymore, or a large fridge freezer you can never fill) are good options to sell online and can make you quite a decent profit.

Consider using specialised second-hand trading websites such as [eBay](#), [Shpock](#) or [Gumtree](#). But make sure to stay safe when selling online, and ask for help or advice from friends or family members if you are unsure about anything.

### Give yourself enough time

Whether you are choosing to downsize by moving to a smaller property or simply clearing out some of the possessions you own, you will need ensure you give yourself enough time to go through the process thoroughly. Try to be methodical and take care not to overwhelm yourself. Visit each room in the house and think about what you really need:

- **In the kitchen.** How much do you use your once treasured kitchen gadgets, multiple sets of cutlery and heavy duty pots and pans?
- **In the bedroom.** Do you have a wardrobe full of unused clothes you never passed along?
- **In the living/dining room.** Why not donate old books you have read and maybe even replace an old dining table with a smaller one?

As you go through each room, ask yourself some questions about the items you may want to discard. For example:

- When was the last time you used it?
- Do you own another similar item?
- If not practically useful, does the item have sentimental value?
- Is it in good condition, or will it need replacing in the near future?
- Would someone else (such as a friend or family member) make better use out of it?

### Take care of yourself

Don't forget that decluttering or downsizing to a smaller residence can be a challenge, both physically and emotionally. If you do choose to move, make sure you aren't compromising on location; it's wise to maintain good connections with your community and ensure your family and close friends are still nearby.

Remember these simple things during the process:

- Be patient with yourself and take your time to do the job right. If you can't make a decision on something, seek advice or at least "sleep on it" and move forward when you are ready.
- If you feel tired, rest. Take a break—maybe for a couple of days or even a couple of weeks. And if you're finding the process difficult, ask for help.
- Don't stop living your life while going through this process—go for a walks, meet friends, share your concerns.
- If you are moving from a home that holds sentimental value, remember to reflect on the process of letting go. The same may hold true for the items inside. You may feel a sense of loss, so recognising this is important; acknowledgement will help you move on to the next stage in your life with a more positive outlook.

### Find out more

Here are some additional resources to help guide you through the downsizing experience.

- [Downsizing your home to fund your long-term care](#) from the Money Advice Service has a range of articles offering assistance on lots of financial issues relating to long-term care.
- [Downsizing](#) from the Audley Villages website offers practical tips on how make the move to a smaller property.
- [8 Rules for Ditching Sentimental Clutter](#) by Lauren Piro is a nice article offering tips on how to let go of your sentimental possessions in stages so it can be both a positive and therapeutic step forward.
- [Steps to Downsizing Your Home](#) by Diane Schmidt of The Spruce looks at the downsizing process on both a practical and emotional level.

Downsizing is about the acceptance of the inevitable changes you may experience as you get older. Be proud of yourself for taking the necessary steps to ensure your future comfort and security.

As you make the necessary changes to your environment, pause regularly to enjoy what you have created. You deserve that.

## What to ask when looking for a flat

Major changes can be very exciting. And moving into your own flat is one of the biggest—and most exciting—changes you can make in your life.

Fortunately, independent housing may open up a world of possibilities. With an assortment of services and amenities, independent living and supported accommodations are designed around your lifestyle—even if you need some degree of care or support.

In terms of lifestyle, being part of an independent living community also means you'll have more time for socialising. So if you feel like taking part in different activities, you'll have all kinds of options.

## Getting the essential information

If you find that independent housing is the right kind of living arrangement for you, try to get answers to the following questions before deciding where you want to move:

1. How many bedrooms are there in the flat? Will you be sharing it with others? Or is there a room for a live-in carer?
2. What is the layout of the flat? If a floorplan is available, is it possible get a copy of it that you can keep?
3. Who is responsible for repairs, maintenance and cleaning?
4. How often are the flats refurbished, and how will you be accommodated during that time?
5. How much is the rent and the utility bill? What utilities are included?
6. How much money will the council give towards the expenses, and will it cover 24 hour care or just a few hours a day?
7. How long will the process take to set up my care package?
8. Are background checks performed on the staff? What is staff turnover like?
9. What resources are available in the community? Doctors? Grocery stores? Chemists? Transportation? Restaurants?
10. What parking is available for visitors?

## Additional observations to make on your own

Ask to see the flat (or one similar to it) ahead of time. Look around carefully. Will the space be fully accessible for you? Are light switches and plugs located in places you can easily reach? How much sunlight will you get during the day? Does the flat seem noisy or quiet?

While you're touring the community, try to observe what you can about the neighbourhood too. Do you see a schedule of social activities posted anywhere? Do the other residents seem friendly and eager to socialise? If you have a pet (or want to get one), find out if pets are permitted.

## More resources

Here are some additional checklists you can review. While some of the resources may seem to target older residents, the questions are really appropriate for anyone looking to move into an independent housing scheme:

- [AgeUK](#): Care home checklist (while this downloadable document is designed for people looking for



residential care, the checklist is helpful for independent living too)

- [Ashford Borough Council](#): Frequently asked questions about sheltered living
- [Choice Care Group](#): What does supported living look like?
- [HousingCare.org](#): Help for the aged information sheet (see page 13 of the document)

It is very important for you to get confirmation about certain things ahead of time. If the responses you receive are vague or your questions go unanswered, don't be reluctant to ask your social worker to dig deeper for more satisfying answers.

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## Residential care homes

Residential care homes are designed to give high quality nursing and specialised care in an environment that promotes a meaningful life. But a move into a care home is a big decision that takes time. If you leave it until the last minute, you may limit your options or make a hasty decision that may not be right for you in the long term.

Depending on your needs, you may decide that residential care is your best option when homecare is not available or appropriate.

### Which care home?

Before selecting a home, you should think about the level of care you need, the type of care you'd like and what care home is most suitable for you.

There are three main types of care homes:

**General care.** These homes can offer you support for either the short or long term. In a general care home, you will have your own room—usually with en suite facilities—and there will be activities for you to enjoy. You will also get meals (including help with eating, should you need it) and daily care (including help with personal tasks like washing). While you'll get assistance with managing medications, there is no nursing care available if you have a disability. However, they should be able to assist with 24 hour care if you have an emergency.

**Nursing care.** These homes are the same as care homes, but they have registered nurses and trained professionals who can help with your more complex health needs. So on top of your daily care, you'll be able to receive medical care from qualified staff who are in the home 24 hours a day. You may want to consider a nursing care home (formerly known as a nursing home) if you have an illness or disability that requires regular medical support.

**Care with specialist support.** If you have dementia, mental health issues or physical disabilities, this type of home will be able to provide a specially adapted environment along with activities designed to improve your quality of life. In the past, EMI (or elderly mentally impaired or infirm) was sometimes used to describe these homes, but this term is being phased out. There is a great deal of helpful information about choosing a care home that is suitable if you have dementia. [The](#)

[Alzheimer's Society website offers information on Finding a care home.](#)

Some homes offer both residential and nursing care, and this makes them ideal for couples who have different requirements or anticipate various levels of need in the future. In other words, there might be a certain number of places for residents requiring nothing more than personal care along with a certain number for those requiring specialist support.

So if you are perfectly fit (aside from the normal wear and tear that comes with life) but your spouse needs nursing care, you can stay together by moving into a single facility. Note that these homes were formerly referred to as dual registered homes, but again, that term is in the process of being phased out.

### Care homes with a Jewish lifestyle

Being Jewish means something different to everyone. You may not think of yourself as religious, but you still have connections with people in the Jewish community that has shaped you.

Would you want to join in with Jewish children to celebrate Chanukah by lighting candles? Or do you like the idea of inviting your family over for Friday night dinner? If these options are important, a Jewish care home might be right for you.

Residential homes with a Jewish lifestyle may offer some, or all of the following:

- Shabbat observance;
- Kosher food;
- Regular synagogue services;
- Traditional Friday night meals;
- Celebration of festivals; and
- Entertainment with a Jewish flavour.

### Financing a move

As [the Age UK page explains](#), [Paying for permanent residential care](#) could have a big impact on your decision, so make sure to take the time to explore all of your financing options. When it comes to care home costs, you have three basic choices:

**Self-funding.** If you want [guidance on self-funding, visit the website for the Society of Later Life Advisers \(SOLLA\)](#). This organisation can help put you in touch with an accredited financial adviser who has the right kind of knowledge to help you. Also, [Which? Elderly Care has a Checklist for self-funding a care home](#). Make sure you check out the general information on [Self-funding a care home, also on the Which? Elderly Care site](#).

**NHS funding.** Funding arrangements for ongoing care can have an impact on you, especially if you are at a very vulnerable stage of your life. There is national guidance on this subject which sets out a single, national framework for determining eligibility for NHS continuing healthcare and for NHS-funded nursing care.

**Local authority funding.** The Care Act gives you the right to a free needs assessment from your council, even if your local authority gives you the impression your finances are too high or your needs are too low to qualify for help. Even if financial assistance is not required, a needs assessment is important, as it gives an outline of the type of care and support needed. Find out more about [How a local authority care needs assessment works on the Money Advice Service website](#). You can also find out more by checking out the guide, [Getting local authority funding for a care home: step by step](#), from Which? Elderly Care.

### Preparing for your visits

Once you have decided on the type of care home you prefer and the type of funding you can afford, you should sit down and create a list of homes you'd like to visit. You may also want to read about the experiences of other care home residents.

Before scheduling your visits, double check to find out if the homes meet national care standards. You can look homes up on the following websites:

- [Care homes in England: Care Quality Commission](#)
- [Care homes in Northern Ireland: Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority](#)
- [Care homes in Scotland: Care Inspectorate](#)

Visiting prospective care homes will play a vital part in your selection process. It's a good idea to have a list of questions at hand so you can find out as much as possible during the visit.

There are several great checklists that can help you when evaluating your care home options. Take a look at these links and jot down the questions you think are important. You can bring those questions along with you when you visit potential homes:

- [Care home checklist, from Age UK](#)
- [Choosing a care home, from Which? Elderly Care](#)
- [Choosing the right care home, from Money Advice Service](#)

### Making the move

Now that you've reviewed the types of care homes, arranged your financing, visited your favourite homes and made your selection, how can you prepare for moving day?

Since you will probably be moving into a smaller space, try to concentrate on bringing along only the things that matter most to you. If you haven't used something or worn an item of clothing in the past year, it's probably time to pass it along to someone else who really can use it. Instead of schlepping loads of books you've already read, pick out small things and special items—like mementoes or other tchotchkes—that make you feel at home. Send your boxes of photographs off to be digitally scanned and archived for your family. Create scrapbooks from your favourite snapshots and then pick out a few really good images to be enlarged, labelled and framed so you can put them on display in your new home.

When packing, mark your boxes carefully. It will make life so much easier when you go to set up your new home.

One of the biggest benefits of moving into a residential care home is putting daily chores behind you and your family members. So to make the transition easier, let the management team and caregivers in your new home know what your needs are ahead of time; don't wait until you move in to tell them about the medications you take, the day you like to get a haircut (or go to the hairdresser), or what foods you like or dislike.

Another way to make things easier on moving day is to surround yourself with family and friends. At the very least, they can help make you feel more comfortable and follow up with questions for management and staff.

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## Hospital

A stay in hospital should be a time devoted to your treatment and recovery. The purpose of your admission is to help you live a healthy, happy and active life. But they can also be times of anxiety and uncertainty and almost always involve a disruption of your day-to-day routine.

Regardless of why you have been admitted to hospital, you should be involved in making decisions at every stage of your treatment. Hospital staff should always respect your privacy and treat you equally, whatever your gender, sexuality, age, disability or religious background.

The following sections discuss what you should expect when you go into hospital. Preparing for your stay can make the experience less stressful and help smooth your return home.

### Being admitted to hospital

If you are going to hospital for elective care, there are a number of things that are likely to happen before you are actually admitted. It is normal practice to be sent a letter that will confirm the date of your admission, the name of the ward you are going to be in, the consultant who will take care of you and any special instructions that are particular to your treatment (such as not eating or drinking before attending hospital).

You may also have a pre-assessment appointment with a nurse who will explain what will happen when you go into hospital. During the appointment, you will be provided with a written description of your treatment and any items you will need to take in with you. The nurse will also tell you how long you are likely to be in hospital.

Once you have been given the date and length of your admission, you should make plans for your arrival and departure from hospital. Your GP or another professional who has referred you for your treatment should have already discussed with you whether you require medical transport. You will usually be expected to make your own way in, either by organising a friend or relative to take you to hospital or by taxi.

If you do not qualify for medical transport, cannot arrange for someone you know to bring you into

hospital and are unable to meet the cost of transport, you might be able to claim a refund under the [NHS Healthcare Travel Costs Scheme](#).

Upon arrival, you will be greeted by a member of hospital staff who will explain everything you will need to know about how the hospital is run and the support you will receive. There will also be some forms to be completed. You will need to provide the details of the person you would like to be contacted in the event of an emergency. You may also be asked to sign a consent form for some procedures, such as operations.

### **Staying well in hospital**

For your treatment to be as successful and risk-free as possible, it is important that you are comfortable, clean and in a position to cooperate fully with those looking after you. For example, something as simple as bringing your own pillow into hospital can make your stay much easier.

You may want to consider taking in reading material or even a laptop or tablet computer to help pass the time.

You should bring an accurate and up to date list of any medications you are currently prescribed so that your doctors know exactly what you take. This will help hospital staff make sure you are given suitable medicines and prevent hospital errors.

As hospitals are busy places with many patients and only so many doctors, nurses and other staff to go around, you might have only a few opportunities each day to talk to them about your treatment. If you have questions for your doctors and nurses, it is a good idea to write them down so you do not forget to ask them when the opportunity arises.

Maintaining high standards of personal hygiene in any hospital environment is vital. You should clean your hands regularly using alcohol-based hand wash or soap and water, the latter being particularly important after using the toilet to prevent diarrhoea. If you have concerns about the hand hygiene of any members of staff you come into contact with, you should feel free to ask them whether they have recently washed their hands.

You should be careful not to share personal items or equipment with other patients since this can spread infection. For the same reason, avoid touching any wound or device that enters your body, such as a drip or catheter. You can find further tips on hospital hygiene in the [NHS Choices Guide to staying in hospital](#).

### **Religious observance in the hospital**

The Jewish religion offers many dispensations when people are ill and unable to follow Jewish laws and traditions as strictly as they might usually do. When someone's life is in danger, Judaism prioritises their survival above all other considerations. In the Guide to Traditional Jewish Observance in a Hospital, the well respected Rabbi known as the Ohr Hachaim once wrote: "one who transgresses Shabbat for a dangerously sick person is not called a transgressor of Shabbat, but a guarder of Shabbat."

However, it is usually possible for you to practise many aspects of your faith during a stay in

hospital. You should be able to ensure that your meals are compatible with a kosher diet. High quality food is important to the care of all patients, and hospitals must always cater for a range of requirements. If you want to make sure that you receive kosher food, inform your nurse. [Jewish Visiting has a guide to Jewish Dietary Laws that includes a section on Keeping Kosher in Hospital.](#)

Most hospitals have a chaplaincy service which provides spiritual and pastoral support to patients and hospital staff of all religions and belief systems. With the help of chaplaincy staff, you may be able to request the presence of a Rabbi or a Jewish volunteer who can offer spiritual guidance.

Multifaith and belief rooms are also common in hospitals. These offer suitable areas for worship, prayer, contemplation and meditation. Your hospital may even hold Jewish religious services.

### **Know your rights**

Understanding your rights as a patient is vital to ensuring you receive the best quality healthcare. The NHS in England recently set out many of these rights in its new Constitution. This Constitution outlines the roles, responsibilities and rights of hospital patients and staff in the delivery of healthcare services.

As well as explaining important legal rights, the Constitution commits healthcare professionals to a number of pledges. These provide comprehensive and high quality services that are appropriate to you, meet your needs and reflect your preferences. You can read more about your rights in the [NHS Constitution for England handbook, which is available on GOV.UK.](#)

You might want to find out how your hospital compares with others. You can do this by visiting the website of the [Care Quality Commission \(CQC\)](#), which inspects and publishes reports on health services around the country. Inspection reports are freely available to members of the public and can be easily located using the website's search facility. You can also use the CQC website to give feedback on the quality of the care you received.

### **Rights for people with disabilities**

If you are disabled and need to go into hospital for treatment, it is important that you let staff know about your disability and any extra support you might need during your stay. If you have been referred by your GP for treatment, the practice should have already informed your hospital of at least some of your needs.

When you arrive, you should discuss your needs with the member of staff who has been assigned to help you fill in your hospital admission form. Things you might like to mention include any routines you have, specialist equipment you might need and preference with regard to accessing the toilets and bathrooms.

As a disabled person, you should be treated by hospital staff just like any other patient. Most disabled patients will be asked to give their consent to treatment. Only those who lack the capacity to consent under the Mental Capacity Act (2005) may be prevented from directly doing so. You can read more about [Information for disabled people going into hospital on the NHS Choices website.](#)

## Making a complaint

Under the NHS Constitution, you have a number of rights that you should expect to be fulfilled in the event that you need to make a complaint against your healthcare provider. You have the right to have your complaint dealt with efficiently and properly investigated, and you must be informed of the outcome of the investigation.

If you are unhappy with the outcome of the initial investigation, you can take your complaint to the independent Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman. The ombudsman operates freely from the NHS and the government and exists to make final decisions on complaints that have not been resolved.

If you think you have been directly affected by an unlawful act or decision of an NHS body, you can make a claim for judicial review.

Finally, if it is found that you have been harmed by the NHS, you have a right to receive compensation.

Your first port of call in making a complaint about the treatment you have received will usually be the hospital itself. Every NHS organisation has a complaints procedure that you can find out about by asking a member of staff or looking on the website of the relevant hospital or trust. You can also complain to the commissioner of the service, which will either be the local Clinical Commissioning Group or NHS England.

Depending on the nature of your complaint, you may wish to take further action by reporting your concerns to the General Medical Council, the Care Quality Commission, your local Healthwatch branch, the media or the NHS Choices website.

Hospitals have a legal duty of care towards their patients. This means that all healthcare practitioners must take reasonable steps to avoid foreseeable injury to a patient. If you are able to prove in court that a healthcare professional has been medically negligent, you may be entitled to compensation for any resulting psychiatric or physical injury.

There are a few organisations that can help guide you through the complaints process. [Action against Medical Accidents](#) is a charity that promotes patient safety and justice throughout the UK. It provides a free independent advice and support service through a helpline, written casework and inquest support services.

The [Citizens Advice website provides detailed advice on Complaining about the NHS](#). The mental health charity [Mind has a detailed legal guide to Clinical negligence](#), which also includes details of where you can go for further information and help.

## Your benefits and hospital

Depending on your circumstances and the nature of the entitlements you receive from the government, a medium or longer term stay in a hospital may affect your benefits. Benefits that are related to your care outside of hospital, for example, may be suspended after a certain period.



If you receive Attendance Allowance, this is usually stopped after 28 days in the hospital. This applies to either a single stay of more than four weeks or a number of stays that has taken place at intervals of no more than four weeks at a time. The same rules apply to the care component of the Disability Living Allowance.

Carer's Allowance can also be affected if either the carer or the person they are looking after goes into hospital. If the person receiving care is hospitalised, then the allowance may continue for up to 12 weeks out of a 26-week period.

Some benefits are only halted once you have been a patient for 52 weeks. These include social fund payments, housing benefit and your state pension if you are retired.

Other benefits remain unaffected regardless of the length of your stay. To find out more about how going into hospital might affect the specific benefits you receive, you can look at Disability Rights UK's factsheet on Benefits in hospital and the Hospitalisation page on the Rights 4 Seniors website.

### Care after your discharge

Hospital staff will begin planning for your departure immediately after your arrival. It is important that you and your family are involved in identifying any potential problems that need to be addressed and planning any rehabilitation or support services.

Just before you leave hospital, you will need to undergo a series of checks to make sure you are ready to be discharged. Firstly, you should only be allowed to leave if you have been deemed to be medically fit by your consultant or another member of staff who your consultant has said can make the decisions.

You should then have an assessment to consider whether you will need any additional help once you are at home; if so, you need to know what form this should take. If you require extra help, you should not be discharged until a written care plan that sets out your needs has been provided and put in place.

Every hospital has its own discharge policy which you can obtain from the ward manager or the hospital's Patient Advice and Liaison Service.

You should be fully involved throughout this process, and your views—and those of any family members you have given your permission to be involved—should be taken into account. It is also possible to request the assistance of an independent advocate who can help you to communicate your wishes.

If you have been in hospital for a while, you might be fully capable of supporting yourself but find you initially need help to get back on your feet. It is possible that you would benefit from some support with one or two domestic tasks when you return home. You may find yourself accepting help from family, friends and neighbours until your confidence returns.



The [Community Support and Social Work team at Jewish Care Direct](#) offers practical and emotional support, advice and advocacy services throughout the UK. Call 020 8922 2222 or send an email to the [helpline@jcare.org](mailto:helpline@jcare.org) to get in touch with a professional who can help.

To help address more complex care needs, you may be entitled to support through the [NHS Continuing Care](#) scheme or your local authority's social services department. If you have already been advised by hospital staff about the most appropriate care package, this will already be in place.

Finally, you can also contact homecare and support services privately. [The Care Quality Commission](#) website has a directory of social care organisations which you can search to find the most suitable providers in your area.

### Leaving hospital

Once you have had your treatment and the doctors have given you the all clear, it is time to go back home. As you say your goodbyes, there are a number of loose ends you might want to tie up.

For example, you will need to make sure you have collected your hospital discharge letter for your GP if it has not been sent directly to them. You might need to ask your nurse for a medical certificate or to complete a sick note for your employer. You may be asked to make a follow-up appointment.

You should also make sure you have the medication you need, especially if you were already taking medicines before you came into hospital. It is important that you know whether your prescription has been changed.

During your final consultation with your doctor or nurse, you might want to ask if there are any symptoms such as unexpected pain or coughing that you should look out for that would suggest you should get back in touch with either your GP or the hospital.

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### Visiting family or friends in hospital

Planning a visit to see a close friend or relative in hospital can require a bit of preparation. When you start to think it through, there are a number of practicalities to consider. How long should you stay? What will you talk about (or avoid talking about!)? What's acceptable to bring as a gift?

Although there are no set rules, hospital visit etiquette is quite important. However, every patient is an individual, and what might be appropriate for one may be completely disagreeable to another. But don't worry! It doesn't have to be complicated, and most good etiquette is straightforward common sense.

To get you on your way, here are some tips to use as a general guide to help make that visit a little bit better. And remember, even if you don't get things exactly right (and let's be frank, none of us are perfect!) at least the person you're visiting will feel loved, cared for and respected due to the

efforts you've made.

### Visiting etiquette checklist

Here are some ideas to use when going to visit friends or family in hospital.

**Contact the person you're visiting ahead of time.** Let the patient know you're planning to visit. It could be embarrassing for everyone if you walk in at the wrong time, whether it's during a private consultation with a doctor, or while the patient is getting dressed. Usual expectations of space and privacy are compromised in hospital, so it's important that visitors don't add further awkwardness to the situation.

NOTE: For the same reasons, always knock before entering a patient's room to let them know you've arrived.

**Consider any visiting hours in place.** There is a reason for designated visiting hours, and it is important to respect them. For example, the patient may have an important medical examination scheduled just before or after your visit. You can avoid any inconvenience by being on time.

NOTE: Make sure to plan your journey to the hospital well in advance of your visit, especially if it's your first time there.

**Wash your hands!** Good hygiene is really important when visiting a hospital. Don't risk spreading germs to someone who is already vulnerable from illness or major surgery. Make sure to wear clean clothes too, and if you have a cold or any other infection that could be passed onto the person you're visiting, it may be a good idea to reschedule for another time when you are feeling better.

**Avoid wearing fragrances, such as perfume or strong smelling deodorants.** Many patients will be very sensitive to intense smells, and strong odours could cause uncomfortable side effects like headaches and nausea.

**Check if you can bring others with you.** Some hospitals restrict the number of visitors that can arrive at one time. Patients are in a state of recovery, and too many faces around their bedside (particularly energetic children!) could create a stressful environment rather than a welcomed distraction.

NOTE: Remember to keep your visits short. Recovering patients have less energy, so 15 to 20 minutes is usually long enough for a visit. If you feel you didn't have enough time, then it's a great excuse to make another appointment to visit again soon.

**Acknowledge the patient's religious background.** Remember to respect any holidays or festivals they may usually like to observe. With their permission, you could offer to accompany them in prayer, where appropriate.

**Ask if there's anything you can do to help make the patient feel more comfortable.** Nursing staff are often extremely busy, and sometimes small comforts can get overlooked. Offering to find

an extra pillow, clear a breakfast tray or even give the hospital room a quick tidying up could be a lovely gesture.

**NOTE:** Make sure you ask permission from the patient first before doing anything. Remember you are in their private space which must be respected.

### **What to bring instead of flowers or food**

Hospitals can be extremely dull and boring environments, so anything to lift the spirits or offer light entertainment could be a very welcomed distraction.

But many hospitals have restrictions on what can be brought in from the outside world, particularly edible treats or plants and flowers. For these reasons it may be safer to get a little more creative with what you choose to bring as a gift.

Here are some ideas for alternative options that might bring some joy to the person you're visiting.

**Reading material.** Anything from books to magazines could be entertaining. If you want to be really generous, you could even bring an electronic reading device.

**Music.** If the patient is able to use one, you could bring an MP3 player that you've preloaded with music they'll enjoy. You can purchase ones these days pretty cheaply and your efforts to provide such a thoughtful gift will almost certainly be appreciated. Modern mobile phones and laptops can be loaded with music too.

Otherwise, an alternative musical gift option could come in the form of a digital radio or a portable CD player. (Yes, these do still exist if you want to take the old school approach!)

**NOTE:** Don't forget to include headphones with these devices, as patients may need to keep noise levels down at certain times of the day/night.

**Toiletries.** Many patients find that a combination of a hospital's dry atmosphere and side effects of strong medications can contribute to ailments such as dry hands or chapped lips. A thoughtful gift (such as a rich creamy moisturiser or a scented lip balm) could be the perfect present to bring someone, and it doesn't take up much space on precious shelf space.

**NOTE:** If you don't want to go with the unscented option, be careful not to select anything too fragrant, as this can be distasteful to some people.

**A gift card.** Perhaps the person you're visiting has a favourite department store where they like to shop, or maybe they'd appreciate a voucher covering the cost of a cinema visit. This type of gift might give them something fun to look forward to once they have recovered.

**Artificial flowers.** If you are keen on giving flowers, why not consider the fake kind? There are some gorgeous options available which would perfectly brighten up a hospital room but won't carry the

risk of infection (or nauseating aromas) that some freshly cut flowers and live plants might.

**One-player games and puzzles.** These are a great way for someone to pass the time while they're in hospital. There are lots of options available—from Sudoku to crosswords and word searches—which you'll easily find in abundance at any decent stationery shop, online or even at large supermarkets.

NOTE: Adult colouring books are also quite popular these days and are considered to have many therapeutic benefits, like promoting relaxation and reducing anxiety. A couple of these, with a selection of art supplies, could be a wonderfully thoughtful gift for someone.

**Films or television shows on DVD.** Many laptops have options to play DVDs, so if the person you're visiting is lucky enough to have one of these, then a selection of films or a box set of their favourite TV shows could be a really nice present. There are also portable DVD players, which are great for this kind of situation.

**Creature comforts are something everyone misses while in hospital.** You could make this easier to manage by bringing the patient some cosy new pyjamas or some fluffy slippers. Hospital bed sheets are usually pretty basic too, so a lovely soft blanket or a more luxurious pillow could also be a very welcome gift offering.

**Homemade art.** If you have young children that the patient has a close relationship with (maybe grandchildren, nieces, nephews or neighbours) then a handmade card or picture from them is a lovely idea for a present (especially if the patient is particularly fragile, and bringing the children by for a visit isn't a sensible option). A gift like this will help them to feel connected even though they can't spend time together in person just yet.

**Food.** If something food-related is what you really want to give, then make sure to find out that whatever you're bringing is definitely allowed into the hospital and that the patient is able to consume whatever you bring. Remember to take into account any dietary requirements of the patient too. Sometimes it can be good to play it safe with a jar of boiled sweets or even a box of luxury tea bags.

### **Worried you'll say the wrong thing?**

Saying the wrong thing is a common anxiety people feel when they visit someone in hospital. But most patients in hospital are much more effected by loneliness and isolation—not by unintentionally insensitive comments from visitors. Just because you are uncomfortable or anxious about your visit, don't let that stop you.

If you need some inspiration for conversation, here are some suggestions:

**Play games.** Activities like this mean you can entertain each other and focus on the game without having to think too much about conversation. Think about bringing in a deck of cards or a board game like chess or backgammon, and before you know it you'll be having too much fun to think

about any awkwardness.

**Make a scrapbook.** Why not share something meaningful and bring in a selection of photos (or even magazines with images or recipes that the patient may like) and make a scrapbook together. The finished product will be a lovely keepsake for the patient to flick through while in hospital, and it's something they will probably treasure long after they are able to go home.

**Connect with others using Skype, WhatsApp or FaceTime.** This is especially good if you aren't able to bring other friends or family members with you. See if you can log onto the hospital's Wi-Fi and get a fun group conversation going.

**Read to each other.** Why not use the time during your visit to take it in turns reading portions of a book out loud to each other? Not only is it an enjoyable and relaxing way to pass the time, but since it'd be a real challenge to finish the book during a single visit, the activity offers the opportunity to reschedule regular visits to continue the story. You may find that both of you look forward to these appointments, sharing in this creative activity.

However, if finding common ground for conversation is something you'd like to practise, then have a read over some of these top tips for encouraging deeper conversation.

And when you do find yourself in the flow of a good conversation with the person you're visiting, try to remember these positive pointers:

**DO** encourage uplifting topics for conversation. Being unwell and spending long periods of time in a hospital environment can be challenging to a patient's emotional wellbeing, so your job as a visitor is to help lift their spirits. By all means discuss meaningful topics, but keep things positive.

**DO** avoid asking questions about the patient's condition or inquire about recent medical test results. This is private and personal information that the patient will decide whether or not to share. It'll only be awkward for both of you if you ask questions they don't want to answer.

**DO** reassure the person you're visiting that they're missed by friends and family you have in common. This is a good opportunity to fill them in on what some of the people you know have been up to, so they can feel in the loop with social affairs.

**DO** keep your medical opinions to yourself. It makes no sense to offer your own opinions regarding how the patient should be taking steps to recover. And definitely do not relay stories about friends you know with a similar health condition. This visit is all about the person in the room with you, and it's important that you respect their individuality.

**DO** give the patient your full attention, and hold off from answering your mobile phone or checking text messages until after your visit.

**For more information**

Take a look at the following links for additional guidance.

- [NHS hospital services](#) has more information on practical things to remember before visiting someone in hospital.
- [10 things not to say to someone when they're ill](#) is an interesting article by Deborah Orr, a journalist for The Guardian. In it, she describes her experiences of awkward conversation with those who came to visit after she had been diagnosed with cancer.

The most important thing is to enjoy your time with the patient. Your appointment could be the highlight of an otherwise dreary day, so go to the hospital with a positive frame of mind and an intention of being the best companion you can be!

