

# 5 WAYS

To prevent senior hospitalizations<sup>SM</sup>.



# Introduction

Hospitals save lives. But you'd be hard-pressed to find many people eager to spend time there.

Most medical professionals agree that staying healthy enough to avoid a hospital stay should be the ultimate goal. That's especially true for seniors. Professionals who work with seniors often observe that older adults who are hospitalized don't always go home the same. Or, they don't go home at all. Perhaps you are an aging adult who is concerned about these issues. Or you're caring for someone who is.

Several potential risks or aftereffects of hospitalization could hit seniors particularly hard, according to a survey of 400 North American nurses who specialize in senior care and conducted by Home Instead, Inc., franchisor of the Home Instead® network. Leading the list is hospital-acquired infections followed by difficulty getting back into a routine, more health declines, confusion and inability to regain full function.

Dr. Carolyn Clevenger, clinical director of the Integrated Memory Care Clinic at Emory University and past president of the [Gerontological Advanced Practice Nurses Association](#) (GAPNA), explains how the potential issues surrounding hospitalization can jeopardize the health of older adults.



**Dr. Carolyn Clevenger**

*"Even if you're well, hospitalization can be life-threatening. A day in the hospital typically includes considerable bed rest, which could be dangerous to an aging body that already is experiencing decreased circulation and loss of muscle. A cascade of negative things might happen, keeping you from returning to normal and possibly leading to nursing home placement."*

To that end, some experts predict that  
**48.5% of senior hospitalizations**  
could, in fact, be avoided if proper preventative steps are taken.

A hospital stay may be necessary and beneficial. But if there are ways to safely avoid it, most seniors and their caregivers are all for it. There's one powerful factor in helping keep seniors out of the hospital: support. Nearly 100 percent of the nurses surveyed agreed that a family's role in keeping seniors healthy and out of the hospital is as important as that of the medical community. In spite of that, less than half of the seniors (48.6%) they see have family members who serve as active advocates for their care, according to the survey.

The research conducted by Home Instead, Inc., revealed these five preventative actions that could help keep an older adult out of the hospital:

- [Work with a trusted medical practitioner](#)
- [Don't ignore symptoms](#)
- [Reduce risks of falls and accidents](#)
- [Stay active physically and mentally](#)
- [Maintain a healthy diet](#)

Whether you're an aging adult, a family member or another advocate, like a professional caregiver, read this guide to learn more about some of the warning signs, risks and preventative measures that could help keep a senior out of the hospital.

For more information and resources, go to [HomeInstead.com](https://www.HomeInstead.com)

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# 95.5%

of nurses surveyed say following doctor's orders is a very/extremely important action to help keep someone out of the hospital.\*

*Home Instead, Inc. completed telephone interviews with a random sample of 400 nurses who work with seniors in North America (300 in the U.S. and 100 in Canada).*

# Work with a trusted medical practitioner.



## **DON'T**

be a passive patient.



## **DO**

partner with a trusted medical practitioner.

## Warning!

A survey of North American nurses who work with seniors says one of the biggest culprits when it comes to a senior's risk of hospitalization is not engaging with a trusted medical practitioner. Why? Three reasons surfaced in Home Instead, Inc.'s research: unwillingness to change ways, denial of health issues and apathy.

Good medical practitioners should be collaborating with seniors and their families to help develop treatment plans older adults are comfortable following. "Watch for red flags (such as those listed on next page), help serve as an advocate for older adults and build a support system around the senior," said Dr. Clevenger. "And make sure the medical practitioner and his or her staff are available and accessible."

# The Signs and Risks

Signs that someone may not be following a medical practitioner's orders and issues that could make complying with those orders more difficult:

- Missed medical appointments
- Lack of transportation or the inability to get to medical appointments
- Skipping health maintenance checks
- A worsening of chronic conditions such as high blood pressure, diabetes or congestive heart failure
- Presence of Alzheimer's disease or another dementia, which can make following a doctor's orders difficult
- Unfilled prescriptions or unused pills
- Taking four or more medications, which can lead to confusion
- Apathy or disinterest in overall health
- Lack of anyone to advocate or assist with health issues

# The Remedy

Here are steps to help someone better engage with a medical practitioner.

1. Get to know your pharmacist. He or she can help explain the medication a doctor is prescribing, the risks of [medication mismanagement](#) and how best to take medications.
2. Learn more about the potential impact and risks of the chronic conditions someone may be experiencing. Visit [ReturningHome.com](#).
3. Work with a practitioner to track medical appointments and encourage your senior to keep those appointments.
4. If your senior doesn't have transportation to a medical appointment, contact a relative, friend, the local Area Agency on Aging or a professional caregiving company such as a local [Home Instead office](#).
5. If you or a loved one is depressed or apathetic about his or her future, contact a practitioner to discuss options and a possible referral to another professional. Attend medical visits with a vulnerable loved one, if you can, or contact a local [Home Instead office](#) to arrange for a Care Professional to accompany your loved one.





# Waiting too long

to see medical professionals is the most common thing that seniors do that puts them at risk, according to 27.5 % of nurses surveyed.\*

*Home Instead, Inc. completed telephone interviews with a random sample of 400 nurses who work with seniors in North America (300 in the U.S. and 100 in Canada).*



# Don't ignore symptoms.



## **DON'T**

discount "just another ache".



## **DO**

tune into symptoms.

## Warning!

It can seem like just another ache or pain – to the senior you love and you. After all, doesn't growing older come with those issues?

Maybe, but feeling ill should not be ignored. According to Dr. Clevenger, when one local hospital partnered with a home health agency to look at readmissions, "Here's what they saw happening: the home health aide would call the senior to say they were coming by that day. The older adult would say they didn't want a visit because they weren't feeling well. The next day that senior would be in the emergency room."

Better to be safe than sorry and seek help.

# The Signs and Risks

Signs that aches and pains – or health conditions – could be putting someone at risk:

- Ignoring symptoms such as chest pain, shortness of breath and abdominal pain
- Discounting subtle changes or issues such as changes in walking speed or shuffling, inactivity, loss of appetite and weight fluctuations, and unsteadiness
- Living alone or not having someone checking in daily
- Presence of three or more chronic conditions
- A recent hospitalization (Visit [ReturningHome.com](http://ReturningHome.com) to learn more.)
- Unwillingness to change ways
- Putting off medical appointments
- Lack of funds or perceived lack of funds

# The Remedy

The following steps can help someone stay on top of the issue.

1. Find out from a medical professional the issues that could be putting someone at potential risk of hospitalization. Staying on top of health problems with a medical practitioner could help reduce the risk of hospitalization.
2. Doctor follow up is an important part of staying healthy. Learn how to help [manage follow-up appointments](#).
3. Change in appetite or weight is a warning sign that something could be amiss. Check out these [7 nutrition tips](#) for older adults.
4. Before going to the medical practitioner, help your senior loved one prepare a list of questions about medications they are on or that may be prescribed.
5. If an older adult lives alone, make sure someone is checking in on your loved one each day and helping to manage his or her care. Learn about the [5 signs](#) an aging adult is experiencing loneliness.



## Making home free of Hazards

It's one of the top action items to help keep seniors healthy and out of the hospital.\*

*Home Instead, Inc. completed telephone interviews with a random sample of 400 nurses who work with seniors in North America (300 in the U.S. and 100 in Canada).*

# Reduce risk of falls and accidents.



## **DON'T**

disregard  
repeated falls.



## **DO**

reduce risks of  
fall accidents.

## Warning!

When it comes to falls, older adults can be evasive, which creates the potential for an accident and a trip to the hospital. Each year, nearly 3 million older people are treated in emergency departments for fall injuries, and more than 800,000 of these patients are hospitalized, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

More than one in four older adults reports falling and more than 32,000 older adults die as a result of falls. But less than half of seniors talk to their medical practitioners about falls, according to the CDC.

# The Signs and Risks

Signs that someone may be a fall risk and could end up in the hospital include:

- Previous falls and accidents
- Alzheimer's disease or another dementia diagnosis
- Inactivity
- Isolation
- Presence of throw rugs and other tripping hazards
- Lack of grab bars and proper lighting
- Problems with vision or hearing
- Decrease in walking speed or shuffling
- Mobility issues



# The Remedy

Here are steps to help identify potential fall risks and solutions.

1. Check out these ways to [improve home safety](#) for older adults.
2. [Activities](#), such as leg and arm stretches and leg curls, can help strengthen aging adults and, in turn, potentially reduce the risks of falls.
3. A home safety checklist at [MakingHomeSaferforSeniors.com](#) includes a comprehensive list of ways to help safety-proof an older adult's home.
4. Learn how [exercise and nutrition](#) can fight osteoporosis and help prevent fall-related injuries.
5. Make sure that someone is checking on an older adult each day if he or she lives alone. Look into an emergency alert system or call your local [Home Instead office](#) to learn more about home care assistance.



**96%**

of nurses surveyed say that isolation is a very/  
extremely serious warning sign that could potentially  
indicate a senior is at risk of hospitalization.\*

*Home Instead, Inc. completed telephone interviews with a random sample of 400 nurses who work with seniors in North America (300 in the U.S. and 100 in Canada).*

# Stay active physically and mentally.



**DON'T**

be a couch potato.



**DO**

stay active physically and mentally.

## Warning!

Illness or prior hospitalization can leave some seniors both physically inactive and mentally in a slump. "A colleague found, on average, older adults in the hospital are only out of bed for 30 minutes in a 24-hour period," noted Dr. Clevenger.

Whether it's a hospital stay or illness, physical inactivity can leave an older adult prone to a worsening of chronic conditions and the prospect of depression.

On the flip side of that: "Research has shown that people who remain active over a lifetime decline for a shorter span of time," Dr. Clevenger said. "Studies reveal that individuals have the potential to build muscle mass, even 100 years of age and older, with the proper exercise. And more muscle mass can lead to better balance and joint health."

# The Signs and Risks

Some signs that a senior's inactivity may be making him or her vulnerable to hospitalization include:

- Prior illness or hospitalization  
(Visit [ReturningHome.com](https://www.ReturningHome.com) to learn more.)
- Loss of a spouse or significant other
- Poor appetite or change in weight
- Inability to drive and lack of alternative transportation
- Loss of friends
- Lack of mealtime companions
- Signs of depression
- Problems with cooking and house keeping
- Lack of interest in hobbies and activities; isolation and change in behavior

## The Remedy

Look to these steps for some ways to help keep someone on the move physically and engaged mentally.

1. Stimulate an older adult's mind by doing a puzzle a day. Check out these [activities](#) for the mind, body and soul to learn more.
2. If a loved one is alone at mealtimes, look for ways to encourage interaction such as suggesting they dine at the senior center. Check out the [companionship diet program](#) at HomeInstead.com for tips and activities to help enhance mealtimes.
3. Even if someone is homebound, you can plan activities such as movie night.
4. Hiring a personal trainer or certified exercise specialist is a good option for seniors who are willing and able, Dr. Clevenger noted.
5. Look into resources that might be available through a local Area Agency on Aging. Contact a local [Home Instead office](#) to discover how a Care Pro could help.



# 93%

of nurses surveyed say loss of appetite is a very/  
extremely serious warning sign that could potentially  
indicate a senior is at risk of hospitalization.\*

*Home Instead, Inc. completed telephone interviews with a random sample of 400 nurses who work with seniors in North America (300 in the U.S. and 100 in Canada).*



# Maintain a healthy diet.



## **DON'T**

act like Ho Hos are a food group.



## **DO**

maintain a healthy diet.

## Warning!

One of the biggest risks to a senior's health is poor diet. There are many reasons for that, from illness that impacts appetite to medications that can change the taste of food. Various factors may conspire to keep older adults from preparing and eating the nutritious meals they need.

Diet and companionship go hand in hand. "When you eat with others, appetite is better and emotional well-being is improved," said Dr. Clevenger. If someone is living alone and unable to prepare healthy meals, he or she may not be getting a balanced diet — one of the biggest risks that could send a senior to the hospital.

# The Signs and Risks

Signs that someone could be at potential risk of poor nutrition and a trip to the hospital:

- Confusion caused by Alzheimer's disease or another dementia
- New or increasing medications
- Inability to get to the grocery store
- No help in preparing meals
- Loneliness that negatively impacts appetite/interest in eating
- Lack of understanding proper nutrition
- No mealtime companions
- Weight fluctuations

# The Remedy

The following are steps that can help ensure someone is getting the proper diet.

1. Become acquainted with the [5 mealtime challenges](#) including grocery shopping for one. Look for help at the local senior center or Area Agency on Aging. Or contact your local [Home Instead office](#).
2. Remind your senior of a favorite family recipe. Then make it together. Check out the recipes of the [companionship diet program](#).
3. Learn about the signs of poor nutrition. Check out these [7 nutrition tips](#) for older adults.
4. Help make older adults part of mealtime fun. Go to [6 ways](#) to make older adults part of your family meals.
5. Become better educated about nutrition with these [6 common misconceptions](#) about nutrition as we age. And learn more about senior dietary restrictions from this [resource guide](#).

# Notes

# Resources

The Home Instead network stands ready to provide the types of services that can help older adults make a successful transition from a hospital or facility back to their familiar home environment and routines during the critical 30 days after hospital discharge.

## **The Home Instead network's services include:**

- Readying an older adult's home including changing bed linens, straightening the house to create a welcoming environment, buying groceries and preparing healthy meals;
- Discharge coordination and execution;
- Medication and nutrition management;
- Personal Care;
- Alzheimer's disease care and hospice support;
- Record keeping;
- Monitoring for warning signs;
- Transportation to follow-up physician visits. For more information, contact your [local Home Instead office](#) or go to [ReturningHome.com](https://www.ReturningHome.com).

## About the Expert

Dr. Carolyn Clevenger is a Professor, clinical track, and gerontological nurse practitioner. She is the Associate Dean for Transformative Clinical Practice with oversight responsibility for the Office of Clinical Affairs, the Emory Nursing Experience, and the Integrated Memory Care programs at the Nell Hodgson Woodruff School of Nursing. She most recently served as Associate Dean for Clinical and Community Partnerships. She is a nationally recognized educational leader in advanced practice nursing and in geriatrics and gerontology. She is a Past President of the Gerontological Advanced Practice Nurses Association, Fellow of the American Association of Nurse Practitioners (AANP) and the Gerontological Society of America, and contributor to the AANP Certification Program. She is Clinical Director of the nurse-led patient centered medical home for people living with dementia, the Integrated Memory Care Clinic (IMCC). IMCC represents an innovative clinical model that provides memory and primary care in a single integrated model for people living with dementia and their care partners.



## About Home Instead

Founded in 1994 in Omaha, Nebraska, the Home Instead® franchise network provides personalized care, support and education to enhance the lives of aging adults and their families. Today, the network is the world's leading provider of in-home care services for older adults, with more than 1,200 independently owned and operated franchises that provide nearly 90 million hours of care annually throughout the United States and 13 other countries. Local Home Instead offices employ approximately 100,000 Care Professionals worldwide who provide relationship-based care services that enable older adults to live safely and comfortably in their own homes for as long as possible. Home Instead franchise owners partner with clients and their family members to help meet varied individual needs. Services span the care continuum – from providing personal care to specialized Alzheimer's care and hospice support. Also available are family caregiver education and support resources. Visit [HomeInstead.com](https://www.HomeInstead.com). Connect with us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

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go to [HomeInstead.com](https://www.HomeInstead.com).**

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