5 Ways
To Prevent Senior Hospitalizations™
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.

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 Senior Care® 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 from Emory University, president-elect of the Gerontological Advanced Practice Nurses Association (GAPNA), explains how the potential issues surrounding hospitalization can jeopardize the health of older adults.

“Even if you’re well, the human body experiences normal age-related changes. There’s a decrease in circulation and loss of muscle. Add to that hospitalization, which can include complete bed rest. A cascade of things can happen, which are universally negative and could lead to nursing home placement.”

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.

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

- Follow doctor’s orders
- Don’t ignore symptoms
- Reduce risks of falls and accidents
- Stay active physically and mentally
- Maintain a healthy diet

Whether you’re 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, including a “Hospitalization Risk Meter” to help assess a senior’s potential risk of hospitalization, go to PreventSeniorHospitalizations.com.

*Survey results found at PreventSeniorHospitalizations.com

Please note that the content, suggestions and tips included in this guide are provided for informational purposes only. They are not intended to be and should not be construed as being medical advice or a substitute for receiving professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always seek the advice of a physician or other qualified medical provider for any questions you or a loved one may have regarding a medical condition. Home Instead, Inc. and the Home Instead Senior Care franchise and master franchise network expressly disclaim any liability with respect to the content, suggestions and tips included in this guide.
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 following doctor’s orders. Why? Three reasons surfaced in Home Instead, Inc.’s research: unwillingness to change ways, denial of health issues and apathy.

So, how do you convince an older loved one that sticking to a doctor’s rules can be the best course of action? “Watch for red flags (such as those listed below), help serve as an advocate for older adults and build a support system around the senior,” said Dr. Clevenger.

The Signs and Risks
Some signs that a senior may not be following doctor’s orders and issues that could make complying with those orders more difficult:

- Missed doctor appointments
- Lack of transportation or the inability to get to doctor’s 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 some steps to help an older adult follow doctor’s orders.

1. Download a medication tracker at SeniorEmergencyKit.com.

2. Learn more about the potential impact and risks of the chronic conditions a senior may be experiencing. Visit CaregiverStress.com®, chronic conditions.

3. Work with your loved one’s physicians 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 Senior Care office.

5. If you think your senior is depressed or apathetic about his or her future, contact a doctor to discuss options and a possible referral to another professional. Attend doctors’ visits with a loved one, if you can, or contact a local Home Instead Senior Care office to arrange for a CAREGiver℠ to accompany your senior.
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 at 1 p.m. 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
Some signs that a senior’s aches and pains – or health conditions – could be putting them at risk:

• Ignoring symptoms such as chest pain, shortness of breath and abdominal pain
• Discounting subtle changes or issues such as changes in gait speed or walking/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 to learn more.)
• Unwillingness to change ways
• Waiting too long to see the doctor
• Putting off medical appointments
• Lack of funds or perceived lack of funds
The Remedy

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

1. Help your loved one find out from his or her doctor the issues that could be putting him or her at potential risk of hospitalization. Staying on top of health problems with a doctor could help reduce the risk of hospitalization.

2. Go to the Hospitalization Risk Meter at PreventSeniorHospitalizations.com to help determine that risk.

3. Change in appetite or weight is a warning sign that something could be amiss. Check out others at CravingCompanionship.com.

4. Before going to the doctor, help your senior loved one prepare a list of questions. Learn other ways to help improve communication between seniors and doctors at CaregiverStress.com.

5. If an older adult lives alone, make sure someone is checking in on your loved one each day and helping to manage doctor’s appointments. And to be better prepared for emergencies, go to SeniorEmergencyKit.com.
Don’t: Disregard repeated falls
Do: Reduce risk of falls and 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. In 2012, 2.4 million nonfatal falls among older adults were treated in emergency departments, and more than 722,000 of these patients were hospitalized, according to the Centers for Disease Control.

The following statistics, from a study reported in a 2012 issue of the American Journal of Preventive Medicine, are even more telling: One of three older adults (those aged 65 or older) falls each year, but less than half talks to their healthcare providers about it. Seniors are falling, but they don’t want to talk about it.

“A fall is a warning sign,” said Dr. Clevenger, “and is considered a symptom of other potential health issues.”

The Signs and Risks
Some signs that a senior 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 gait speed or shuffling
- Mobility issues
The Remedy
Here are some steps to help identify potential fall risks and solutions.

1. The assessment and balance video at PreventSeniorHospitalizations.com can help family caregivers determine the potential for their senior loved ones to fall and tap into exercises that could help strengthen their balance.

2. Many emergency room doctors recommend that families conduct an annual home safety check of their seniors’ homes. Go to MakingHomeSaferforSeniors.com for an interactive home safety tour to learn how.

3. A home safety checklist at MakingHomeSaferforSeniors.com includes a comprehensive list of ways to help safety-proof an older adult’s home.

4. Go to GetMomMoving.com to learn how some seniors become frail and review simple exercises that could help to improve their physical health.

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 Senior Care office to learn more about companionship assistance.
**Don’t:** Make way for the 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. “The more of that lifetime you can be active and doing the things you consider functional means the shorter decline at the end of life.”

**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 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
- Lacks interests and hobbies, isolation and change in behavior
The Remedy
Look to these steps for some ways to help keep a senior on the move physically and engaged mentally.

1. Stimulate an older adult’s mind by doing a puzzle a day. Go to GetMomMoving.com for the details and other ideas.

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 CravingCompanionship.com for more.

3. Even if a senior is homebound, you can plan activities such as movie night. For more ideas for Mom – or Dad – go to GetMomMoving.com.

4. What’s more, older adults who are homebound or in care communities can still give back. Why not suggest your loved one be a greeter at church or another event? For other ideas, go to CaregiverStress.com, Give Back program.

5. Look into resources that might be available through a local Area Agency on Aging. Contact a local Home Instead Senior Care office to discover how a CAREGiver could help.
**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 a senior 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**
Some signs that a senior 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
- Doesn’t understand proper nutrition
- No mealtime companions
- Weight fluctuations

**Don’t:** Act like Ho Hos are a food group
**Do:** Maintain a healthy diet
The Remedy
The following are some steps that can help ensure a senior is getting the proper diet.

1. Become acquainted with the “10 mealtime challenges” including grocery shopping for one. Look for help for a senior loved one at the local senior center or Area Agency on Aging. For other challenges and tips, go to CravingCompanionship.com.

2. Remind your senior of a favorite family recipe. Then make it together.

3. Learn about the signs of poor nutrition, including weight fluctuations of 10 pounds in six months and others at FoodsForSeniors.com.


5. If a loved one has Alzheimer’s disease or another dementia, submit your questions about food challenges to the free Confidence to Care mobile app. Experts will answer your questions and offer tips.
About the Expert
Dr. Carolyn Clevenger RN, DNP, GNP-BC, is associate professor and assistant dean for MSN Education at Emory University in Atlanta, Ga. Dr. Clevenger is a recognized expert in gerontology and healthy aging, and serves as president-elect of the Gerontological Advanced Practice Nurses Association (GAPNA).

About Home Instead Senior Care
Founded in 1994 in Omaha, Neb., by Lori and Paul Hogan, the Home Instead Senior Care® network provides personalized care, support and education to help enhance the lives of aging adults and their families. Today, this network is the world’s leading provider of in-home care services for seniors, with more than 1,000 independently owned and operated franchises that are estimated to annually provide more than 50 million hours of care throughout the United States and 16 other countries. Local Home Instead Senior Care offices employ approximately 65,000 CAREGivers℠ worldwide who provide basic support services that enable seniors to live safely and comfortably in their own homes for as long as possible. The Home Instead Senior Care network strives to partner with each client and his or her family members to help meet that individual’s needs. Services span the care continuum — from providing companionship and personal care to specialized Alzheimer’s care and hospice support. Also available are family caregiver education and support resources. At Home Instead Senior Care, it’s relationship before task, while striving to provide superior quality service.

To find a Home Instead Senior Care office near you, go to HomeInstead.com.