

Health matters



These tips can help you get the most from health services when acting on behalf of someone you care for.

Appointments

1 Get registered with your GP as a carer

Being registered with your GP as a carer can provide you and the person you care for with more support.



“Register with your GP. Make sure the person’s GP has you listed as that person’s unpaid carer.”

2 Be assertive

When making a non-urgent appointment, put yourself first.



“Try not to accept a date that will compromise something that you’ve been looking forward to – ring and change it to suit you.”

3 Think ahead

“If someone you care for with dementia has a hospital appointment, it may be appropriate to ring the relevant department well in advance so that their condition can be flagged in the notes. This can give hope that any additional needs will be met.”



4 Take someone with you if you need support

Can you ask a friend or relative to be there at difficult times?

“When attending hospital appointments likely to contain complex information or a life-changing diagnosis or treatment, take a third party along and provide them with a designated notebook in which to take notes. Everything will then be in one place.”



Ways to master medication

5 Plan ahead

“Have a list copied out (and possibly photocopied several times) of all the names of the medication and the daily doses etc, so that when someone goes into hospital the list can just be ready and handed over. This is also good to have to hand when dealing with appointments because it is difficult to remember the names and when the medication is taken.”



6 Make notes

“At hospital appointments I also take a lot of notes so that I can understand at least a little of the medical jargon. It’s essential to go back to these or to ring up again if you don’t understand what a prescription is for etc.”



7 Ask questions

“It’s always important to ask about side-effects of drugs and remind medical professionals of existing medical conditions in case these have been missed in the notes.”

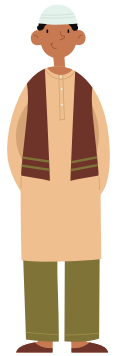
“Remind medical staff about medication – and ensure that nothing is being prescribed that someone is allergic to.”

Helping healthcare professionals relate to you

8 Keep composed

Remaining calm and polite (even when you feel deeply frustrated inside) will help you get what you need.

“My advice is always to be proactive and question care politely.”



9 Keep track of key contacts

“I keep a file of all documentation so that it is all in one place. Whenever I speak to anyone, I ensure that I get contact details and write down the date I spoke to someone. If you do that systematically every time, you don’t have to rely on memory when querying treatment or medication or just generally relaying information.”

10 Showing appreciation helps

“I think it is essential to thank excellent care – which we always do. This includes paramedics, who in my view are often the unsung heroes.”



11 Explain why you need flexibility

“I’ve had extensive experience of having to juggle appointments with work, which is quite exhausting. I always explain when making appointments that I am working and caring, and check if there can be some flexibility on the appointment time. Don’t be shy to ask for that, as they won’t know if you don’t tell them your challenges.”

12 Do your research

“I found that the more familiar I became with my husband’s conditions, the more I could speak with confidence and I was able to gain healthcare professionals’ trust.”



13 Seek clarification

“My advice is don’t be scared to speak to consultants – and don’t be afraid to tell them to simplify their language and explain. Medical jargon can be confusing.”

General guidance

14 Be prepared when someone is ready to leave hospital

It's helpful to become familiar with your rights as a carer.

“My advice is, if possible, be at the hospital when someone is discharged and ask medical staff to slowly explain the medication and what after care will involve. Ask them to slow down while you take notes. Get phone numbers of who to call if you don't understand once you get home.”

15 Keep a diary or calendar of progress to refer to

“I keep notes and records so I can refer back to a certain occasion or meeting. I found this so useful when I could refer back to care plans from a few years' previous.”



Further resources

Some people find using Jointly helpful. This is an app by carers for carers designed to help families coordinate tasks, share responsibilities and communicate more easily. Find out more at carersuk.org/jointly

Our self-advocacy guide also offers tips on working with professionals and understanding your rights. See carersuk.org/self-advocacy

See our 'Coming out of hospital' guidance: carersuk.org/hospital

Let your GP know you care: carersuk.org/your-gp. They can also advise you about accessing online patient records.

We would welcome your feedback – please email comms@carersuk.org



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