After Discharge From the Hospital

Depending on the type of surgery and how well you are recovering, your doctor will decide when you are ready to be discharged from the hospital. When you leave the hospital, there are a lot of things you need to do to take care of yourself and avoid any complications. You will leave the hospital with instructions and reminders including:

1. Set a follow-up appointment with your doctor
   Before you leave the hospital, you will be given instructions on when to follow up with your doctor. If possible, try to schedule the appointment before you leave the hospital.

2. Expected activity – do’s and don’ts
   Make sure you know how active you are allowed to be after discharge. Ask your doctor when you may:
   - Lift anything (and if you are permitted to lift, how many pounds?)
   - Drive a car
   - Exercise
   - Have sexual relations

3. Wound care
   In order to avoid wound infection after surgery, you need to be diligent about wound care and hand hygiene. By following these tips, you will be less likely to get a wound infection:
   - Keep the dressing clean and dry
   - Do not remove the dressing to show others your wound, and don’t let anybody touch the dressing or the wound
   - Follow your doctor’s instructions for wound care
   - Contact your doctor immediately if you experience any symptoms that may indicate an infection, such as unexpected pain, chills, fever, or excessive wound drainage.

For more information about how to recognize signs of infection, refer to the Stop Light System of Infection Prevention in the “Avoiding Problems After Surgery” resource in the Hospital Stay section of the SSI toolkit.
After Discharge From the Hospital (continued)

4. Medications
At discharge, you will be given a list of the medications to take during your recuperation. Make sure you take all your medications, including your pain medications, as prescribed by your doctor. Ask your doctor if any of the new medications on your list replace what you used to take. It is a good idea to have the doctor call in the prescriptions to your pharmacy or have the hospital pharmacy fill the prescriptions, if possible, so you can begin taking your medications as soon as you get home.

5. Post-discharge care and rehabilitation
Discharge planning starts when you are admitted to the hospital. A care manager/case manager will likely visit you during your hospital stay if you are not able to be discharged home to your own care. Your insurance and your physical restrictions will also play a role in your discharge planning. Depending on your surgery, rehabilitation may be recommended:

- **Inpatient/acute rehabilitation** – Inpatient/acute rehabilitation offers at least three hours of physical therapy a day.
- **Short-term/skilled nursing rehabilitation** – Sub-acute rehabilitation is inpatient rehabilitation that is less intense than acute. You can expect to receive one to three hours of therapy a day.
- **Outpatient rehabilitation** – May be an option if it is safe for you to be discharged to your home but you still need physical therapy. The frequency of your therapy sessions will be decided based on your needs and insurance situation.
- **Home care** – Home care is an option for those patients who are medically stable and feel well enough to return home after discharge from the hospital. Once you are home, a nurse from the home care agency will contact you, and you will receive visits by a nurse and/or physical therapist, depending on your needs.

6. Nutrition
If you are discharged to recover at home, you should be aware of the food you should eat to aid your recovery. Eating well after surgery can affect how quickly you heal; increasing your water intake and eating more protein can aid the healing process. Foods rich in protein include:

- meats, poultry and fish
- legumes (dry beans and peas)
- tofu
- eggs
- nuts and seeds
- milk and milk products
- grains, some vegetables, and some fruits (provide only small amounts of protein relative to other sources)

For more information about nutrition, visit http://www.cdc.gov/nutrition/everyone/basics/protein.html.