

Hospital Discharge Red Flags

What Caregivers Should Watch For After a Hospital Stay

The period **right after a hospital discharge** is one of the highest-risk times for older adults.

Medication changes, weakness, and incomplete recovery can lead to complications within the first few days or weeks.

Knowing what to watch for can help caregivers identify problems early.

Changes in Mental Status

Sudden confusion after a hospital stay is **never something to ignore**.

Watch for:

- New confusion or disorientation
- Increased sleepiness
- Difficulty following conversations
- Unusual agitation or personality changes

These changes may signal infection, medication reactions, dehydration, or worsening illness.

Increasing Weakness or Difficulty Moving

Hospital stays often lead to **rapid loss of strength and mobility**.

Warning signs include:

- Trouble getting out of bed or a chair
- Difficulty walking short distances
- Increased reliance on support or assistive devices
- New falls or near-falls

Declining mobility can quickly lead to further complications.

Breathing Changes

Watch closely for:

- New or worsening shortness of breath
- Persistent coughing
- Difficulty breathing when lying down
- Chest discomfort

Breathing changes may signal **heart or lung complications** that require prompt evaluation.

Changes in Eating or Drinking

After discharge, some older adults may struggle with nutrition or hydration.

Watch for:

- Loss of appetite
- Drinking very little fluids
- Difficulty swallowing
- Nausea or vomiting

Poor intake can quickly lead to **weakness, dehydration, and hospital readmission.**

Medication Problems

Medication errors or side effects are common after discharge.

Pay attention to:

- Confusion about new medication instructions
- Missed or doubled doses
- New dizziness or fatigue after medication changes
- Symptoms that appeared after starting a new medication

When in doubt, review medications with a healthcare provider.

When to Seek Medical Guidance

Consider contacting a healthcare provider if you notice:

- Worsening weakness
- Increasing confusion
- Breathing difficulty
- Inability to eat or drink
- New falls

Early attention to these changes can often **prevent situations from escalating.**

Key Reminder

The first **1–2 weeks after a hospital discharge** are a critical recovery period.
Small changes during this time may signal developing complications.