

# Tips for hospitalized teens (12 years and older)

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Children react to and cope with being in the hospital based on their age. The information below includes teens' fears and reactions to being in the hospital. There are ways to help your teen cope with medical experiences.

Your teen may show behavior changes during and after their hospital stay. They may regress. This means they do things they have outgrown. Or, a behavior may happen more often than normal. This may be how your teen reacts to stress. These changes may concern you. Some of these changes are normal and most often go away with time.

## **This age group fears:**

- Changes in how they look and how their friends will see them
- Parents or caregivers and doctors are not telling the truth
- Death or not waking up after surgery
- Pain or injury
- Loss of control and privacy
- Loss of independence
- Separation from home, friends and school

## **What changes could I see in my teen?**

Your teen may have 1 or more of these behaviors:

- Changes in:
  - How they feel about themselves
  - Time spent with friends
  - Sleep
  - Eating
- Wants more attention
- Acts out (may refuse to help or starts to take risks)
- Is concerned with how they look
- Does not want help
- Wants to be left alone

## **What can I do to help my teen?**

Here are some tips that may help you and your teen during and after being in the hospital:

- Tell them when you will be with them.
- Give them time to be alone and time to hang out with friends.

**In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.**

## **Tips for hospitalized teens (12 years and older), continued**

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- Let them:
  - Ask you and the doctors questions. Answer them honestly. Involve them in planning and decision-making when possible.
  - Talk with the doctor about ways to control pain.
  - Tell you what they think will happen and how they feel.
- Support their feelings. Tell them their feelings are normal.
- Prepare them for changes in how they look.
- Bring their favorite items or activities from home.
- Set limits and discipline your teen like you would at home.
- Let your teen make choices about their daily routine and activities when possible.
- Go back to their normal routine as soon as possible.
- Respect their privacy and encourage their independence.
- Give your teen tasks that they can do.
- Tell your teen's teachers about the hospital stay. They can help your teen if behavior changes happen at school.

Remember that behavior changes are common and most often go away. This is how your teen copes with their hospital stay. If you have concerns or questions before you leave the hospital, please talk with a nurse, doctor or child life specialist.

**This teaching sheet contains general information only. Talk with your child's doctor or a member of your child's healthcare team about specific care of your child.**

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