



Handy Hospital Help Guide

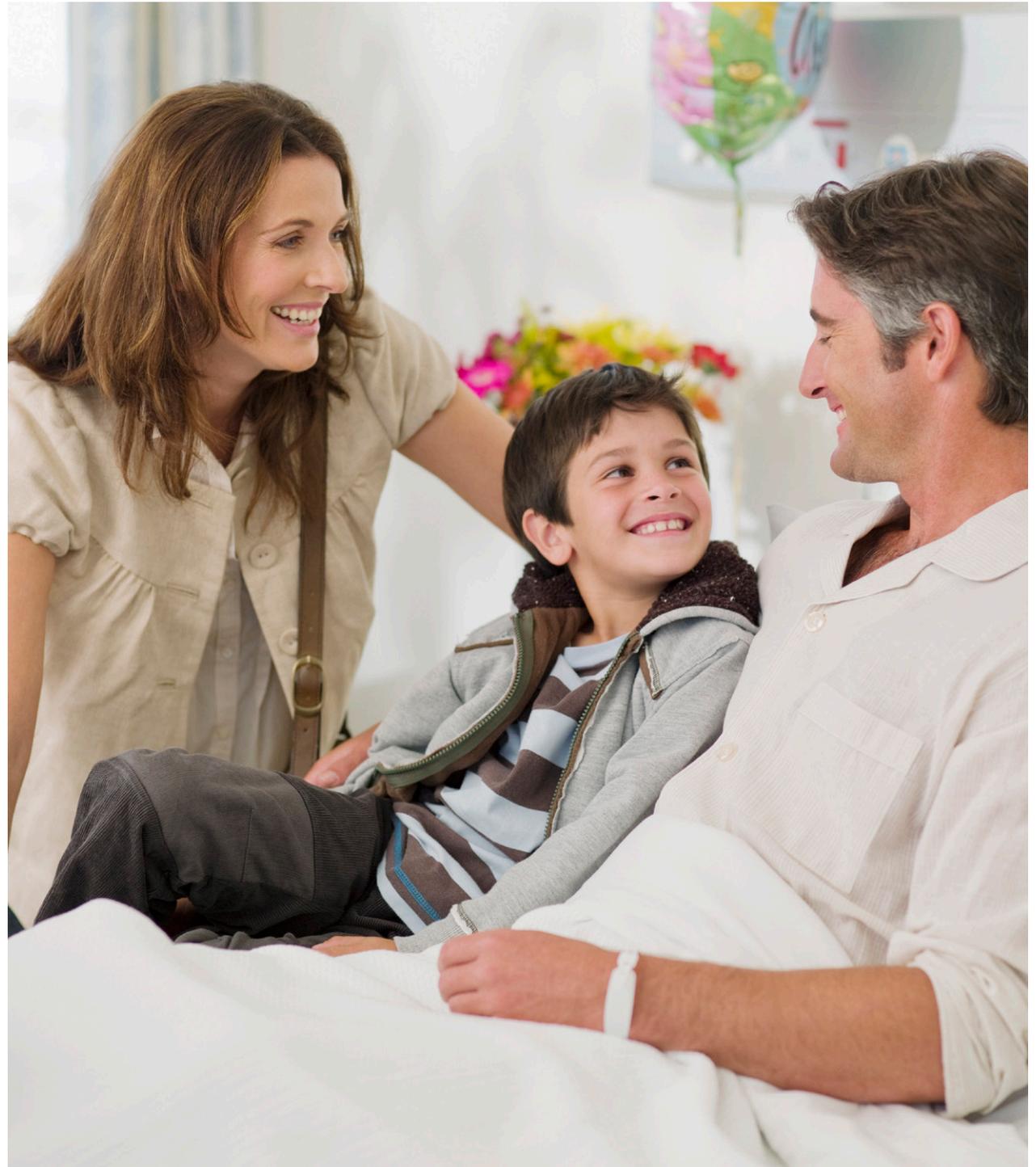
From choosing gifts, to turning up at the right time, to knowing what to say, there's a lot to think about when you're going to see a loved one in hospital. To find out more about people's views and feelings about hospital visits, we surveyed over 2,000 members of the British public. Based on the results, in this eBook, we give you tips and advice to ensure that your next visit runs as smoothly as possible.

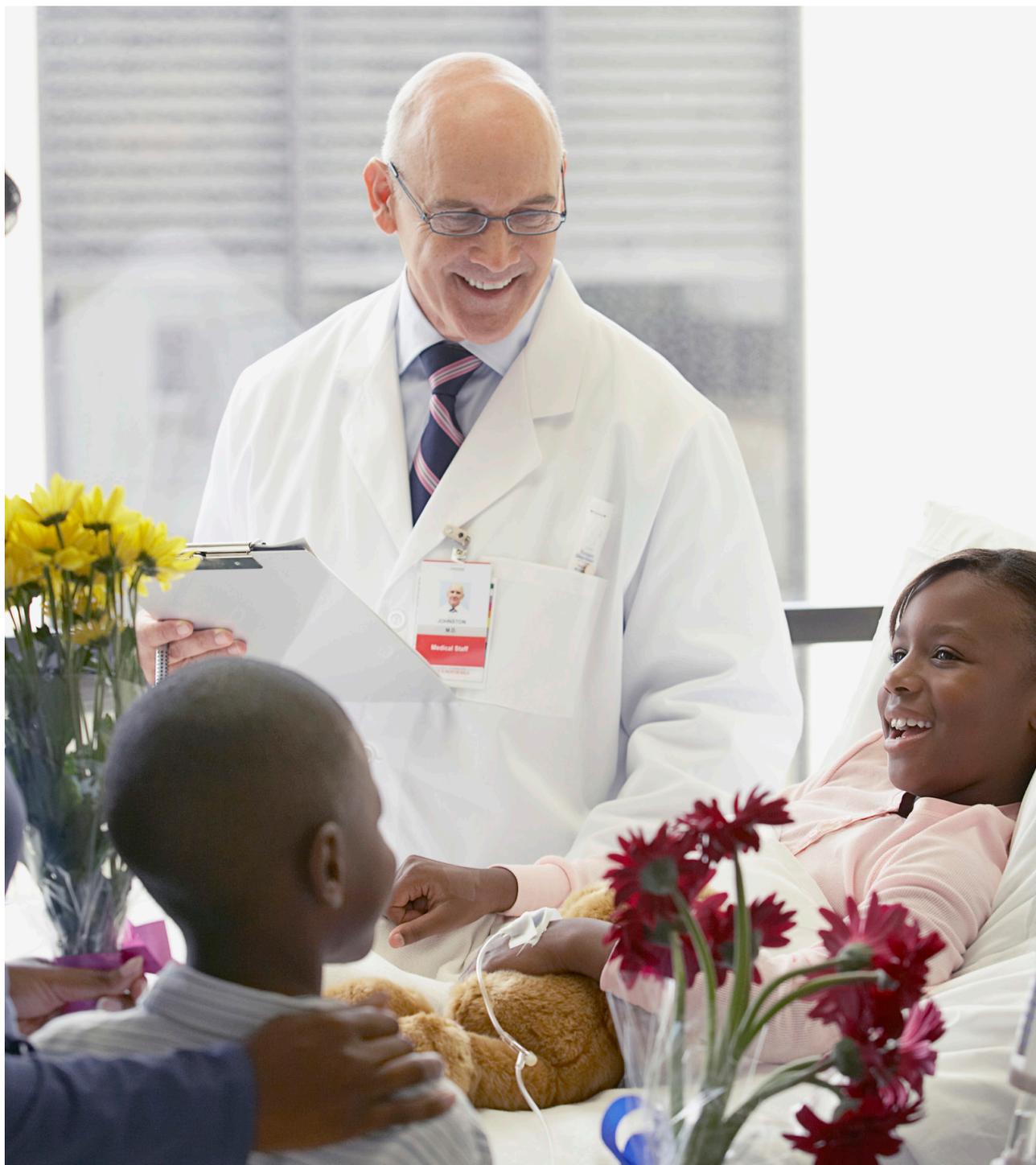
Got your own stories or advice you'd like to share? You can join the discussion using the hashtag [#HospitalHelpingHand](https://twitter.com/HospitalHelpingHand).

To go or not to go?

Before you get into the detail of planning a hospital visit, you'll need to decide whether it's really such a good idea to go at all. If the patient's too ill or tired, they've had a lot of visitors already or they're about to be discharged, it's probably best to wait.

Also, if you're not well yourself, it's important to realise that your visit might do more harm than good. For example, if you have a cold, the flu or you're suffering from vomiting or diarrhoea, there's a risk you'll infect patients, staff and other visitors in the hospital. Even if you've recovered from a stomach bug and you're now feeling fine, you might still be an infection risk. The NHS recommends you wait for at least 48 hours after your symptoms have gone before you visit someone in hospital. If you're not sure what to do, contact the ward your loved one's staying on for advice.





90% of respondents said they had visited a loved one in hospital.

56% of people said they would visit a friend, partner or family member in hospital if they were staying there for one night, while 89% would visit a loved one who was in hospital for three nights and 95% would go to see a loved one staying in hospital for a week.

62% of people said they would appreciate being visited by a loved one if they were in hospital for one night. This increased to 89% if they were in hospital for three nights and 93% if they were in hospital for a week.



Planning your visit

- People's first port of call for information about visiting rules and regulations is hospitals' websites. Nearly a third of respondents (28%) said this would be the first place they would go to get clued up. The joint second most popular options were phoning the hospital and asking a member of staff at the hospital (both 17%).
- 12% revealed they would go to the NHS website to get this information, while 8% said they would ask the patient they were visiting.





There's no getting around the fact that going to see a loved one in hospital can be an upsetting experience. But if you plan your visit carefully, you can at least take some of the stress out of the situation. With this in mind, it's worth paying attention to the following tips:

Always check the visiting hours

So that you don't end up making a wasted journey, always check the visiting hours before you set off. Most hospitals have set times when you can visit patients, and this can vary between different wards. You can check the hospital's website for information on visiting hours or you can call the ward and speak to a member of staff.

Coordinate your plans with other friends and relatives

Hospitals may restrict the number of visitors that patients can see at any given time, so it's useful to get in touch with other friends and relatives to make sure you don't all arrive at once. Also, it's a good rule of thumb to always try to check in with close family members just before you set off to see if your visit is still a good idea. You don't want to arrive when the patient is feeling especially tired or if they're in the middle of tests or treatments.

Travel

Parking in hospitals can be pricey and there may be limited spaces available, so if you're planning an extended visit, it may be cheaper or more convenient to take public transport. However you decide to get to the hospital, make sure you know your route before you set off, and this includes finding out exactly where the appropriate reception is. Hospitals can be big, confusing places, so it's worth doing your research.



Hospital etiquette

To ensure you don't make any faux pas when you arrive, it's useful to get to grips with some basic hospital etiquette.

Hand hygiene

Good hand hygiene is a must when it comes to keeping the infection risk in hospitals in check, so make sure you play your part by cleaning your hands using the alcohol gels provided. It's especially important to do this when you enter or leave a patient's room or ward.

General hygiene

Avoid the temptation to sit on or put your feet on the patient's bed as this can spread germs. Also, although it might sound obvious, don't touch the patient's wounds or any equipment they're attached to, like drips. It's best to avoid using patients' toilets too.

When to excuse yourself

If your loved one's receiving treatment or care when you arrive, wait outside until the nurse or doctor has left. Or, if you're already there when a member of staff arrives to provide care or discuss medical issues, say you're leaving the room and you'll be back shortly. This means the patient won't be in the awkward position of having to suggest that you leave. Also, if you're on a long visit and another friend or relative arrives, take the opportunity to leave for a while and stretch your legs. As well as giving you a break, this will mean the patient and the other visitor have some time alone.





Knowing what to say

Even if you're best pals or close relatives, knowing what to say to someone when they're in hospital can be difficult. The important thing is not to put yourself under pressure to always say 'the right thing'. Often, there is no right thing. What really counts is being a good listener and showing some understanding.

Also, patients often like being distracted from their surroundings and situations, so don't assume they'll want to discuss medical matters the whole time. Some news about people you both know and what's going on in the world outside the hospital entrance might help to lift your loved one's mood.





If you're worried that you'll run out of things to say when you're there, try to think of a few conversation topics before you go. And bear in mind you don't have to chat constantly. Just being there at their bedside shows you care, and your loved one might be too tired to want to talk all the time.



Gift Ideas

The chances are you'll want to take a gift with you on your hospital visit, but what passes for a good present?

A warning about flowers

A colourful bouquet of flowers can instantly brighten up a room, but if you're planning to buy blooms for your loved one, check if this is allowed first. There hasn't been an official ruling from the Department of Health on what visitors can and can't give to patients, but some hospitals or individual wards ban people from bringing flowers, so it's always important to find this out in advance.

Food

Edible treats are popular gifts and wards sometimes encourage visitors to bring healthy snacks like fruit to patients. Check what is and isn't permitted though, and of course make sure the food is suited to the dietary needs of the patient. The medical team on the ward will be able to advise you on what is and isn't allowed.

- Newspapers and magazines were the most popular gift choice when respondents were asked what they would most like to receive during a hospital stay - regardless of whether this stay was one night, three nights or a week.
- Food and drink took the second spot, followed by cosmetics and toiletries.



Sleeping aids

If you've ever spent a night in hospital, you'll know how difficult it can be to get a good night's rest in these often busy and noisy environments. To help your friend or relative improve the quality of their kip, consider taking them gifts like earplugs and eye masks.

Keepsakes

Especially if your loved one is spending more than a few days in hospital, a keepsake could be the perfect present. For example, small framed photos don't take up much space and they instantly personalise a hospital bay or room.

Toiletries

If the patient had to go into hospital suddenly, they might not have picked up all of their toiletries. So why not take them some nice hand cream, lip balm or shower products?





Pyjamas

Let's face it, hospital gowns can be unpleasant to wear. To help your loved one feel more relaxed and comfortable, you could give them a set of pyjamas. Front-fastening ones are usually best because they're easy to take off and put on. Perhaps you could include a pair of slippers or bed socks to complete your present. They're perfect for protecting feet from cold lino floors.

Entertainment

To stop the days from dragging, think about giving your loved one a gift that helps them to pass the time. From books, newspapers and magazines to puzzles, craft kits, handheld gaming devices and MP3 players, there are lots of options to choose from.



Buying for a new mum?

There's no shortage of gift ideas for new mums. Here are some of the best:

Baby essentials

Save her time and money by giving essentials like a baby sling, sleepsuits, muslin squares, hooded towels, bibs, pram blankets and toys. Try to find out what she's already stocked up on and what other people are giving her to avoid buying things she doesn't really need.

Comfy loungewear

Looking after a newborn tends to involve plenty of snuggling on the couch and in bed, so why not treat mum to some new loungewear so she can do this in style?

Pampering products

Pampering products like body oils, hand creams, moisturisers and bath soaks are always welcome.





Mementos

Keepsakes from the day the baby was born make extra thoughtful gifts. Anything from newspapers and magazines to no. 1 singles are ideal as mementos.

A professional photo shoot

Help mum celebrate the new addition to her family with a professional photo shoot. She'll be able to treasure the snaps forever.



Buying for a child?

When it comes to buying for kids, make fun your top priority. These ideas should give you a head start:

Toys

Whether it's Paw Patrol, Peppa Pig, Transformers, Pokemon, Hot Wheels or something else, find out what the child's really into right now and give them a toy in that theme.

Games

Games like Frustration and Connect 4 can be a great way for kids to pass the time. For younger children, alternatives include simple peg puzzles and jigsaws.

Craft and construction kits

Everything from paints and Playdough to jewellery making sets and construction kits such as Lego can be the perfect distractions. For younger tots, try stacking blocks or cups.





Electronics

Portable DVD players and handheld games consoles are another top choice. Just make sure you provide some headphones too.

Themed pyjamas or slippers

Since they'll be spending a lot of time in bed, some new pyjamas are bound to come in handy, while slippers are great if they need to get around. Rather than dull designs, go for fun, themed sets.



Last-minute presents

Don't panic if you're pushed for time and can't make it to the shops before your visit. Most hospitals have their own stores selling items like greeting cards, toiletries and confectionery. Some even have more specialist outlets such as second-hand book shops and florists. You can always check the hospital's website before you set off to see if they have something suitable.





Top tip

If the patient has a close relative or friend who is staying with them in hospital, consider taking them a gift too. After all, looking after a loved one around the clock and being cooped up in a hospital room can be emotionally draining and physically tiring, so it's important to show carers that their efforts are appreciated. As a general rule, anything that makes a good gift for a patient is probably a safe bet for a caregiver as well.



Taking children with you

Knowing whether to take children to hospital to visit family members isn't easy. On the one hand, you might be worried about the emotional impact these experiences will have on kids or have concerns that they'll misbehave while they're there. On the other hand, perhaps you're thinking about the potential benefits of taking children to see their loved ones in hospital. For example, these visits can help to demystify medical environments for youngsters and make them seem less scary. After all, when they enter hospitals, kids can see they are places where people go to get help. Also, being able to spend time with their relatives can reassure children that these people are OK and are being well looked after.

There's no easy answer to the question of whether or not you should take kids on hospital visits. You just have to weigh up the various pros and cons - possibly seeking advice from close relatives and friends - and come to a decision. If you do want to take kids with you, check the rules of the ward you're visiting. Some wards require you to get permission before you visit with youngsters. The nurse in charge will be able to explain the policy to you.

Hospitals can tire children out quickly, so where possible try to keep these visits short. Also, consider taking a game that they can play quietly to keep them occupied. This should help to free you up to focus on the patient.



- 46% of respondents believed young children should be taken to visit relatives in hospital, compared to 25% who thought they shouldn't.

How to thank hospital staff members

If you're impressed by the standard of care your loved one receives in hospital and want to leave a gift to the staff members on the ward to say thanks, it's important to bear the following pointers in mind:

You can't give money to staff members

There are strict rules in place that prevent hospital workers from accepting gifts of money from patients or visitors. If you want to make a financial contribution, you can do so by donating to the hospital, specific ward or related charities instead. You'll be able to find out more about your options and get all the details you need online or by speaking to members of staff.

Snacks and refreshments are usually a safe bet

In most cases, staff can accept presents of fruit, chocolates and other snacks and refreshments. It's probably a good idea to check what's allowed before you splash your cash though.





While people's experience of hospital treatment and care is often positive, problems do sometimes occur. If you think you or a loved one may have a claim for clinical negligence and want expert advice, you can turn to the team at Slater and Gordon.

Thanks for downloading and reading this eBook. We hope it helps to take the stress out of your next hospital visit.

http://www.dbh.nhs.uk/Dont_spread_your_germs.aspx
<http://www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/AboutNHSservices/NHShospitals/Pages/visitors.aspx>
<http://www.coch.nhs.uk/all-services/neonatal/visiting.aspx>
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<http://www.burtonhospitals.nhs.uk/patients/how-to-thank.htm>
<https://www.kch.nhs.uk/patientsvisitors/help-keep-our-hospital-clean> [http://www.uhbristol.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/
preparing-to-come-to-hospital/bringing-food-into-hospital/](http://www.uhbristol.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/preparing-to-come-to-hospital/bringing-food-into-hospital/)
https://www.buzzfeed.com/sarahbreen/gifts-every-new-mum-secretly-needs-wqs1?utm_term=.kipzq5WM2#.xfaXj0Yz5
<http://www.gosh.org/donate/send-gift>

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 2095 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 20th - 21st June 2017. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).