

IS IT REALLY AN EMERGENCY?

There are few clear rules about what is an emergency and what isn't. The American College of Emergency Physicians lists the following warning signs of a medical emergency:

- Bleeding that won't stop
- Breathing problems
- Changes in mental status such as unusual behavior, confusion or persistent drowsiness
- Chest pain
- Choking
- Coughing up or vomiting blood
- Fainting or loss of consciousness
- Head or spine injury
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Injury due to a car accident, burn or smoke inhalation, near drowning
- Deep or large wound
- Sudden, severe pain anywhere in the body
- Sudden dizziness, weakness, or change in vision
- Swallowing a poisonous substance
- Upper abdominal pain or pressure
- Suicidal or homicidal thoughts

WHAT TO DO IN A MEDICAL EMERGENCY

We know it's not easy to think quickly and clearly in a medical emergency. That's why we've created this checklist for you to keep handy — just in case. If you suspect a medical problem is critical or life-threatening, the most important thing to remember is call 911. Don't wait, don't hesitate, just call. If you are the sick or injured person, get a ride or call an ambulance.

DO NOT DRIVE YOURSELF TO THE HOSPITAL.

If you don't think the problem is an emergency:

- Use the "Search" feature to look up your problem on this website, and read the information about when to call a doctor. See if there is home treatment you can try.
- Call your doctor's office, and see if there is a number to call for after-hours service.
- Call a nurse line for advice. The nurse can help you decide whether you need to get help now or whether it is safe to wait.
- Go to a walk-in clinic (if one is open).
- Go to the ER if you feel the problem cannot wait until your doctor's office or a walk-in clinic is open.

If the situation is not critical but you need to go the Emergency Department, and you can step away for a moment, try to gather the following items for the injured or sick person to bring to the Emergency Department or give to emergency personnel.

- Photo ID
- Medical insurance card
- A list of allergies, recent illnesses and chronic health conditions
- Physician contact information
- A list of medications and/or supplements they regularly take - (It's a good idea to have such a list compiled and handy for every family member)
- Emergency contact list
- Cell phone and battery charger

WHAT TO DO IN A MEDICAL EMERGENCY

If you or your loved one is hospitalized, it's helpful to bring the following items:

- Any medical equipment the patient uses every day, such as glasses or contact lenses and lens-cleaning solution, a hearing aid, a cane, wheelchair or walker, or a C-Pap machine
- Overnight bag with pajamas, underwear and socks, and a change of clothing
- A small amount of money or a credit card (to purchase toiletries or arrange transportation, for example)
- Legal paperwork (Power of Attorney, Advance Directive, or other healthcare proxy)

DO NOT bring jewelry or other valuables. Emergency Department patients are frequently moved for testing, imaging and other procedures and it's easy to lose things under stressful circumstances.

Arrival and Triage

When you arrive at the emergency room, we will assess the severity of your condition through a process called "triage". A triage nurse will evaluate your condition based on your vital signs, symptoms and whatever information you provide about past medical problems and allergies. The triage nurse's task is to ensure that patients with most urgent medical conditions are seen first.

