

Ten Things to Know Before Going to the ER

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Sooner or later, you will find yourself taking your child to the emergency room (ER)—it's bound to happen. Nearly 24 million children visit the ER each year in the United States!

Here are 10 tips to help you know what to expect and be better prepared when your time comes.

1. Plan Ahead and Consider a Pediatric Emergency Room

In a serious emergency, you should always go to the closest ER—period. Do you know where your nearest ER is located? Do you know which hospital your pediatrician is affiliated with?

If you take your child to an urgent care center or ER that does not have pediatricians or pediatric specialists on staff, your child may need to be transferred to a hospital that does depending on his or her condition.

Children's hospitals, for example, have an atmosphere more geared to children—colorful rooms and murals, waiting room toys and TVs tuned to kids' shows, and child-sized furniture. Some children's hospitals and pediatric emergency departments also have child life specialists on staff. They are highly trained to help families and can be an excellent resource to make your child's stay more comfortable in the ER and provide a bridge between the hospital and home. Child life specialists also help to ease your child's anxiety before, during, and after procedures.

2. Call Your Pediatrician First

If you can reach your pediatrician's office, do so. They can give advice on the phone and, if you do need to head to the ER, your pediatrician can call ahead and tell the ER staff to expect you. In a serious emergency, parents should not hesitate to call 911.

3. Treat Your Child at Home

It is ok to give your child **over-the-counter fever or pain medicines** before heading to the ER—The medicine will make a huge difference and often makes the examination process a lot easier. Remember to take note of the time and dosage you gave your child, as it will be one of the first questions you are asked in the ER.

4. Stay Calm and Tell Your Child What to Expect

When you panic, your child's anxiety level goes up. For many kids, the anxiety about what's going to happen is worse than the actual pain. Children of all ages look to their parents for reassurance, so it is important to keep communicating. Be honest, but also be sensitive to the situation and his or her age. Let your child know that everyone is there to help.

5. Leave Siblings at Home

If possible, make arrangements so you don't have to bring young siblings to the ER with you. This way, you can focus on the needs of your sick child, and your other children do not have to endure the waiting time. Note that you will need to stay with your child throughout his or her ER stay and are strongly encouraged to stay in the hospital with your child if he or she is admitted.

6. Bring Your Child's Medical History and a List of Medications

It's always a good idea to have the following information readily available. You may be asked this information by multiple providers and staff in the ER:

- Health insurance
- Your child's primary pediatrician and any other doctors' names and contact information
- Known allergies
- Past medical and surgical history
- List of current medications (including prescriptions, over-the-counter painkillers, homeopathic medicines, vitamins, and supplements)
- chronological sequence of events leading to your child's ER visit

It is also important to know the time your child last ate. Many ERs do not allow patients to have anything to eat or drink until the doctor says it is OK. The main reason is to protect your child if he needs to have a procedure done and/or receive any medications that require an empty stomach. During this time, it's a good idea to refrain from eating in front of your child.

7. A Comfort Item Can Go a Long Way

If your child requires a special item to rest or feel at ease, don't hesitate to bring it. A lovey, toy, blanket, book, etc. can help take your child's mind off the pain and less anxious in an unfamiliar place.

8. ERs are Not First Come, First Serve

Understand that there may be good reasons to wait in the ER. The sickest patients are seen first. If your pediatrician calls the hospital before your arrival, however, it can sometimes help speed up the process. In addition, depending on how sick your child is, he or she may need blood work and/or **imaging**. Realize that it can take a long time for lab work and/or imaging results to come back. As they say, patience is a virtue!

9. You Know Your Child Best—Speak Up!

As a parent, you are the best advocate for your child and the best interpreter of his or her needs. If you think your child is in pain, say so. If you don't think he or she is ready to go home, tell a member of the ER team.

Don't be afraid to ask repeated questions and be patient. You and your child will meet lots of different people—the ER is a multidisciplinary team. Repeating your story and providing background to each doctor can seem redundant, but it is essential to getting the best care for your child.

10. Follow Up with Your Pediatrician

After the ER visit, call your pediatrician's office and inform them about the diagnosis. Many ERs will also send a report to your pediatrician's office if you ask them to. Check to see whether your pediatrician has received the report or if he or she has any further recommendations. Many times, your pediatrician will ask to see your child for a follow-up exam.