

Pre-reading Question: Have you ever been treated at a hospital emergency room? Describe the experience.

## Emergency Room Guidelines

Sore throats, muscle aches, and simple scrapes can be uncomfortable, but it is not necessary to go to the hospital emergency room (ER). Yet, these and other minor symptoms account for up to 75% of all ER visits, according to the *Consumer Reports on Health*, April 2002. As a result, many ERs are overcrowded and understaffed.

Emergency rooms are designed to handle life-threatening emergencies. Patients with low-priority problems on a busy day can wait hours to be seen. Consider these guidelines:

### Use the Emergency Room or call 911 for:

- Severe or unusual chest pains
- Sudden dizziness
- Difficulty breathing
- Uncontrolled bleeding
- Broken bone
- Bullet or stab wounds
- Severe head or abdominal pain
- Poisoning or drug overdose
- Head or eye injuries
- Large burns or cuts

You should call 911 or an ambulance service if the patient needs emergency aid but cannot be moved.

### *Be prepared when you use the ER:*

1. Check in first. Describe your symptoms clearly.
2. The most severe cases, such as a heart attack or gunshot wound, are treated first.
3. Have information on your health insurance, medications (bring them with you), allergies, medical history, and any chronic diseases such as diabetes.
4. Have someone go with you to answer questions and get instructions.
5. If treatment doesn't help you or you feel worse, request a second opinion. Don't leave until you feel well enough to do so.

### You don't need the Emergency Room for these low-priority problems:

- Sore throat or other cold and flu symptoms
- Sore muscles or minor sprains
- Fever 103° F; under 101° F in infants (unless instructed by a doctor)
- Earaches
- Minor cuts or burns

If you take these low-priority problems to the ER, you may wait hours for care.

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