

Don't Drive to the ER, Use an Ambulance Instead

Why you should call an ambulance instead of driving someone or yourself to the ER (Hospital Emergency Room). Also, what to do while waiting for the ambulance, after the ambulance has arrived & how to find the patient in the hospital.

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Why Take An Ambulance

You might not be able to carry the patient safely to the car. If the patient had a fall, the vertebra might be cracked, & unsafe carrying could break the neck or back.

Because of the emergency, the driver could be in a panic. Driving mistakes could be made & risks could be taken. Accidents could happen. There may be lots of traffic & the car does not have a siren. Honking the horn will not generally clear other cars out of the way.

When you call for an ambulance, the dispatcher might be able to tell you how to immediately help the patient.

EMT's (Emergency Medical Technicians, i.e., the people in the ambulance) can immediately start procedures to help the patient (medicine, fluids, CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation), stop severe bleeding, etc.). Are you trained in these techniques? Do you remember your training? Can you do it while in a panic? A patient can go from sort of bad to really bad very quickly. Consider a patient with a mild asthma attack that gets very bad on the way to the ER. It would be difficult for the driver or another passenger to diagnose & treat in this case. In an ambulance, an EMT can quickly help a patient who gets worse.

EMT's know the best hospital for the patient's issues. They might know of a long wait at the nearest hospital & know to go to another hospital. The EMT's can let the hospital know they are coming with a patient with specific issues, so the hospital can prepare.

You could get blood, vomit, diarrhea all over your car. Parking could be a problem. You drop off your friend at the emergency entrance, but you can't park there. You have to leave your friend, with no one to explain the situation, to go park. If you are the one in need, you would have to park & then walk to the emergency entrance.

Here is an example of why you shouldn't drive yourself to the ER. A friend of mine was feeling terrible & drove himself to the ER. He walked in the door & before he got to the reception desk, collapsed. He was having a heart attack. What if he had collapsed while he was driving?

You might be concerned about the cost of an ambulance, since they can be quite expensive.

*To soothe your fears, before an emergency, ask your insurance company what it would cost under what circumstances. For example, your insurance company might cover some/most of the cost if using a car would endanger your health. Be sure you understand what all the conditions are. If your claim is denied, make sure there were no errors in the documentation. You can also appeal the decision.

An exception is for a minor injury that still needs the ER, e.g., sprained, maybe broken wrist. In a case like this, if all participants feel comfortable, you could consider driving to the ER.

*Know how to call an ambulance. In most of the US, use 911.

While Waiting for the Ambulance; Ambulance Has Arrived

While waiting for the ambulance, make preparations. Note time of the incident. Be sure the patient's cell phone is on the patient's body. The patient will want to make phone calls in the hospital. But first, check the lock screen (tap power button) & power off screen (hold power button) to see if emergency info is shown & write it down. *Before an emergency, enter emergency info on your cell phone's lock & power off screens.

Be sure the patient has a wallet. Might need ID, cash, insurance cards, emergency contact info (write this down for yourself). If there is no emergency contact info, add your name/number to the wallet. Take the patient's car keys. If at home, you might need to move the car. If not at home, you'll want to take the car home so it's not towed.

Clear a parking space for the ambulance. Clear the path from the parking space to the patient. Keep bystanders/pets away. Write the name of the patient & your phone number on the arm of the patient in felt tip pen (in case paperwork is lost).

If you suspect the patient is having a heart attack & you are trained, start CPR. Use an AED (automated external defibrillator) if warranted. In any case, with a suspected heart attack, carefully cut off the patient's shirt. This will save time for the EMT's if they need to use an AED. Note time when start CPR and AED. *For places you frequent (e.g., work, gym), know the location of the nearest AED.

If trained, treat for shock and severe bleeding, as needed. If warranted, use the Heimlich maneuver for choking. If the patient needs to use an EpiPen, help the patient with the use of it. If a drug overdose is suspected, use Narcan if you are trained. Note time of any of these actions.

*Learn CPR & how to use AED. Learn how to treat for shock & severe bleeding. Learn the Heimlich maneuver, how to assist someone with an EpiPen & how to administer Narcan.

Be sure the ambulance can find your house. *Have the address of the house clearly visible & turn on the lights. If the exact location is hard to find (apartment building, place of work, restaurant, etc.), have someone outside with a bright reflective vest who can flag down the ambulance. That person should also be waving a flashlight, flashing road hazard lights and/or bright cloth. That person can then lead the EMT's to the patient. Be prepared to run with the EMT's.

Tell the EMT's the spelling of the patient's first & last name. If time permits, write down the following & give to the EMT: first & last name of patient, date of birth, primary doctor (name & number), health insurance (name & number), known medical issues/chronic diseases, allergies (food, medicine), medications (prescription & over the counter, including vitamins, herbs, eye drops), problems with anesthetic medications, previous surgeries, current pregnancy, contact info (e.g., your name & number), advanced directive.

*Even better, ahead of time, for every family member (including yourself), put all this info into a file on the computer. Then, when you need it in a hurry, you can easily print it. Or have this info on your cell phone (assuming you will be able to login to your cell phone). The EMT's might be able to take a picture of it. Or, add this info to the power off screen of your cell phone. That way a person just has to hold the power button on your cell phone & choose "Medical Info" (no PIN needed) to see the data (some don't have this feature). But be cognizant that anyone can see this info. Have your name & emergency contact info on the lock screen of your cell phone.

Ask the EMT where the ambulance is going. Sometimes it's hard to find the patient later in the hospital. An EMT will tell you the ambulance is going to a certain ER but it might be diverted to a different ER. Because of this, it's a good idea to write down (or take a picture of) the ambulance number (large numbers on the side) & the ambulance company name. Ask for the company's phone number.

Finding the Patient In the Hospital

When looking for a patient later, be aware that there are different terms for being treated in the ER versus being admitted to the hospital (treated/outpatient vs admitted/inpatient). Also, if a patient is in the hospital for outpatient treatment/surgery (i.e., not spending the night), they are not considered "admitted". If a patient is in the hospital for "observation services", even if the patient stays overnight, the patient is still not considered "admitted".

If you ask for a patient in the hospital, they might not have a record of that since the patient was only in the ER (not the hospital proper). Thus, when you call, be sure to explain the circumstances, so they can tell you what to ask for. Some hospitals will give out a one word condition & location of the patient if you supply the patient's full name. Try different spellings of the name.

Because of privacy concerns, hospitals might not tell you if a patient is there. In some hospitals, patients being treated for trauma are kept anonymous. Sometimes they will only give out information to immediate family members or emergency contacts. *Be sure you & your friends have info in their wallets that show name, number & relationship for family & emergency contacts. For your close friends, know who the emergency contact is for them or how to get that info on their phone without a PIN.

To make contact, you might be able to call/email/text the patient.

Do BEFORE an Emergency

* = do BEFORE an emergency

This file is at:

http://curiousbunny.com/download/ambulance_drive_er.pdf

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