



### Emergency Room vs. Urgent Care

Every day, many people visit emergency rooms (ERs) when they would have been better candidates for treatment at an urgent care facility.

ERs and urgent care centers both offer after-hours care for unexpected medical situations that need immediate attention, and determining which of these facilities is appropriate to your immediate medical needs can save you time and money.

ERs are better equipped to handle life-threatening injuries and illnesses, and other serious medical conditions such as difficulty breathing or sudden, severe pain. Patients at the ER are sorted, or triaged, according to the seriousness of their conditions. For example, a patient with severe injuries from a car accident would likely be seen before a child with an ear infection, even if the child was brought in first.



### Issue Highlights

Inpatient vs. Outpatient Surgery



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## Inpatient vs. Outpatient Surgery

**Many routine surgical procedures used to require days and even weeks of inpatient recuperation. Hospital beds were often filled with patients recovering from relatively minor surgeries. Due to advances in medical technology, new pharmaceuticals and growing economic pressures to keep costs down, more than half of all surgeries today are performed on an outpatient basis.**

Outpatient surgeries, or day surgeries, include everything from arthroscopic knee surgery to tonsillectomies to laser eye surgery. These procedures usually involve a brief visit to the hospital, surgical clinic or doctor's office, and then a prescribed recovery period at home.

Despite the growing number of day surgeries, not all surgeries can be performed on an outpatient basis. The decision to perform an outpatient surgery depends on several factors, including:

- *The type of surgery* – Depending on the complexity and invasiveness of the

procedure, the amount of anesthesia required, and specific recovery needs, a surgical procedure may require a hospital stay.

- *Candidacy for outpatient surgery* – Some patients with certain conditions, such as heart disease or diabetes, are at higher risk for complications. After surgery, they may require more intense monitoring and an inpatient or hospital stay.

Outpatient surgery, if applicable, can have many advantages.

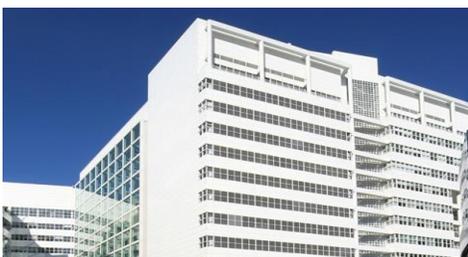
- Research shows that patients tend to prefer outpatient surgery because they are able to recuperate in the comfort of their own homes.
- Outpatient surgery is typically less expensive because it avoids charges associated with a traditional hospital stay.
- Day surgeries are usually less stressful on patients. ◇

# Selecting a Medical Care Facility

**Along with selecting a physician, choosing a medical care facility—a clinic or hospital—is one of the most important health care decisions you can make. The type of health insurance you have may limit your choice of health care facilities; however, you should always research the choices available to you before making your decision.**

When choosing a health care facility, it is important to do some research so you can find the place best suited to your needs. First, get recommendations from friends, family or co-workers. Visit the facilities you are considering and talk with the manager or other staff members about the services, policies and credentials of the facility. Then, ask several qualifying questions to determine if the facility meets your needs. Questions to ask include:

- Is it conveniently located?
- Is the facility licensed or certified by an appropriate state agency? Is it certified by Medicare?
- Is the facility part of your health plan?
- Will it provide a written description of its services and fees?
- Is financial assistance available?
- How well does the organization maintain the confidentiality of its patient files? Are there any circumstances in which this information would be released?



- What is the facility's policy regarding visitors?
- If anesthesia or sedation is necessary for a procedure, are those who will administer it trained or certified?
- Does the facility have a 24-hour phone number you can call if a complication arises after a procedure?
- Does the facility have an emergency patient care plan in case of a power failure or natural disaster?
- Is the hospital clean? Visit and look around. Does the waiting room look comfortable?
- Are the patient rooms private?
- Do you have a medical condition requiring specialized attention? Does this facility offer the care you need due to this medical condition?
- Do you know the facility's success record in carrying out a specific medical procedure you may need? What is the specific training of the physician who will perform this procedure?
- Can your family be kept up-to-date on your condition and medical care?
- Does the facility have social workers, and what services do they provide? Some patients and their families find comfort in speaking with a social worker for their emotional, social, clinical, physical and financial needs.
- Does the facility provide you with the necessary training to continue your recovery after you have been discharged?
- Are the physicians and staff receptive to your questions?

Consider obtaining answers to all of these questions prior to choosing a facility. They could prove vital to your future medical care by helping you choose the facility best suited to your needs. ◇

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To determine whether to visit the ER or urgent care, consider the list below.

Go to the ER if you are experiencing any of the following symptoms:

- Chest pain
- Shortness of breath
- Uncontrollable bleeding
- Broken bones
- Seizures
- Paralysis
- Suspected poisoning
- Severe abdominal pain following an injury
- Loss of consciousness or confusion, especially if after a head injury

Urgent care is adequate for :

- Sprains
- Ear infections
- Urinary tract infections
- Vomiting
- Cold or flu symptoms
- High fever ◇

