

# When Psychiatric Hospitalization Is Needed: A Guide for Patients & Families

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Sometimes older adults experience psychiatric symptoms that become severe enough to require hospital treatment. This may occur when symptoms cannot be safely managed at home or in outpatient care. Short-term geriatric psychiatric hospitalization can provide intensive evaluation, medication adjustment, and stabilization in a safe and supportive environment.

## Situations When Hospitalization May Be Recommended

- Severe depression with risk of self-harm or suicide
- Severe agitation or aggression that creates safety concerns
- Psychosis (delusions or hallucinations) causing significant distress or unsafe behavior
  - Severe anxiety or panic that interferes with basic functioning
  - Medication reactions or complicated medication adjustments
- Sudden behavioral changes that require medical and psychiatric evaluation
- Inability to care for basic needs due to psychiatric symptoms

## Goals of Geriatric Psychiatric Hospitalization

- Stabilize severe psychiatric symptoms
- Identify medical or neurological conditions affecting behavior
  - Adjust medications safely
  - Provide structured daily routines
- Improve safety for the patient and caregivers
- Develop a safe discharge and treatment plan

## What to Expect During a Hospital Stay

### Evaluation and Assessment

- Psychiatric evaluation
- Medical review and physical examination
- Medication review
- Laboratory tests or imaging when needed
- Cognitive assessment if memory concerns are present

### Daily Structure

- Regular meals and medication schedules
- Structured daily routines
- Nursing and physician monitoring
- Therapy groups or activities when appropriate

## Medication Management

- Careful adjustment of psychiatric medications
- Monitoring for effectiveness and side effects
- Simplification of medication regimens when possible

## Safety Measures

- Supervised environment to reduce risk of harm
- Staff trained in caring for older adults with psychiatric symptoms
- Fall prevention and medical monitoring

## How Families Can Help

- Provide information about symptoms and history
- Share medication lists and past treatments
- Communicate routines or calming strategies that work at home
- Participate in discharge planning discussions
- Offer reassurance and emotional support to the patient

## Planning for Discharge

- Medication changes may be reviewed
- Follow-up appointments will be scheduled
- Outpatient therapy or psychiatric care may be recommended
- Home safety or caregiving needs may be discussed
- Community resources may be provided

## Tips for Families

- Hospitalization is often temporary and focused on stabilization
- Improvement may occur gradually as medications and treatments take effect
- Maintaining communication with the treatment team is helpful
- Caregivers should seek support during stressful periods

## National Organizations & Resources

- ✓ National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)

📞 1-800-950-NAMI | 🌐 [nami.org](http://nami.org)

- ✓ Alzheimer's Association

📞 800-272-3900 | 🌐 [alz.org](http://alz.org)

- ✓ National Institute of Mental Health

🌐 [nimh.nih.gov](http://nimh.nih.gov)

- ✓ Eldercare Locator

📞 1-800-677-1116 | 🌐 [eldercare.acl.gov](http://eldercare.acl.gov)

## Final Notes

- Geriatric psychiatric hospitalization is used when symptoms become severe or unsafe.
- The goal is stabilization, safety, and developing a clear treatment plan.
- Families play an important role in supporting recovery and planning next steps.