



Making Your Hospital Room Your Haven

By Ilana Jacqueline

IT'S THAT TIME again. You're being wheeled into a hospital room. You have no idea how long you'll be there. It could be a night. It could be a month. With an immune deficiency, it's a guessing game how long an infection will take to clear up — and it's no small hazard to be in the most infectious building in the city.

This room is going to be your home now, so you've got to make it work. Here are some of my top tips for keeping your hospital room cozy, clean and conducive to getting well.

1. *Disinfect.* A custodian has come through and wiped the same rag over the mouthpiece of your room's phone, bed handles, toilet seat and eating tray. I'm sure he or she has also dragged that same grungy mop from room to room pushing dust and gunk and who knows what across the floor you're now supposed to walk across in hospital socks. Don't delude yourself into thinking your hospital room is sterile. It isn't. So make sure your hospital bag includes Clorox wipes, Purell and disinfecting spray. Wipe down the phone, bed handles and eating tray. Get a pair of slippers so your socks don't go from floor to bed dragging all that gunk with them. If you plan on sitting on the toilet seat, wipe it down first! You are vulnerable. So, if ever there was a place to let your obsessive-compulsive tendencies shine, this is it.

2. *Stay cool.* Or hot, if that's your preference. Most hospital rooms now have their own thermostat for each patient to control. I generally like to keep my room cool; it helps keep the germ population at bay. But, it's also easier for me to make myself warm at night than it is to cool myself down. My hospital kit always includes an extra-large throw blanket — something large enough to cover me, but small enough to fit in the

washing machine at home. (Because the first thing you do when you get home is put every piece of clothing you wore at the hospital in the wash!) I also like to bring my electric heating pad. If nothing is actually hurting me, I just sleep on top of it. But if my IV is infiltrated or I have some kind of sore area, I'll wrap the heat pack around it, and I'll be glad the room is cold so I'm not overheated.

3. *Organize.* The truth is, when you're in a hospital room, you're just a marionette. You're attached to an IV, heart monitors and, sometimes, feeding tubes or oxygen masks. Everything needs to be within reach. First thing first: Have someone help you plug everything into nearby outlets: phone charger, laptop, heating pad. You have two surfaces you need to make the most out of: your nightstand and your meal tray. The meal tray opens up into two sections. On one, I keep my laptop, headphones and a notebook with a pen (to take notes when doctors come in and I'm half asleep but need to remember their instructions). The other side of the table is for food, drinks and snacks. Try to put a lid on any beverages just in case you knock the tray while you're sleeping or moving around. On the nightstand goes your phone, tissues, glasses/contact cases or any other personal items you might have. Make sure to wipe down these surfaces every day with a disinfecting wipe.

4. *Make it your own.* OK, as far as that statement goes, I realize how lame it is. Like the hospital room is some sick venue for a nightclub. I get it: This room is never going to be as comfortable as your home, but there are ways to make it less foreboding. Start with scents. I don't know about you, but the smell of hospitals makes me nauseous. So I spray the sheets down with Febreze (they sell it in a travel size, and Bath & Body

Works also sells lavender linen spray). I also keep a small bottle of essential oils to add to my disinfecting wipes. Yes, I am that fancy. You can also add things like your own pillow case and a screensaver of your dog on your laptop.

5. *Gear up.* Everyone knows the hospital is not the place one goes to get rest. Not unless you sleep best with a nurse coming into your room every 10 minutes to poke you and take your temperature and blood pressure, doctors coming in to see you at the crack of dawn, and being told you're being wheeled down for a test *just* as you're about to fall into that deep sleep. The IV poles are beeping. Your roommate has a hacking cough that never ends. One of the nurses is on her phone right outside your door. How is anyone supposed to recover in this kind of atmosphere? Ear plugs and eye masks. There's also a free app from Brookstone that acts as a sound soother; it really helps me sleep when I'm in need of a nap but in an unfamiliar bed. Block out that noise, and don't worry about the roommate who keeps opening the curtains and letting the sunshine in. You control the smells, the temp, the noise, the light, the germs! You've got this *covered*.

It's always the last place you want to be, but if you have to be there, stock your hospital bag with the tools mentioned above to keep you comfortable, sane and maybe even on your way to healing. ■



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