

How to Communicate Your Loved One's Symptoms During a Crisis

When your care recipient is in a medical crisis, your ability to observe symptoms carefully and report accurately might be, quite literally, life-saving. But that is also a time when it may be difficult to function clearly. Here is a list that will help you remember what to look for during a crisis. You may want to read it ahead of time, and then tuck a copy in your patient file for later reference.

- What time did the problem start?
- What was he doing when the problem started?
- Do you know or suspect what might have caused the problem?
- What was the first symptom that you noticed?
- What other symptoms/complaints do you remember?
- Did the symptoms come on abruptly or gradually?
- Was he given any medication or medical treatment just before the problem started?
If so, what was it?
- Did the patient say anything about how he felt when the problem started and/or as it progressed? What was it?
- Does he have a history of this kind of problem? If so, what was the previous diagnosis?
- What did you do to try to help him between the time the problem arose and the time you arrived in the ER or the doctor's office?
- Did something work well? Seem to make things worse?

When to Call For Help

When is a crisis a crisis? When should you call someone else for help? Get help when your care recipient is in some kind of medical distress and you aren't sure what to do.

Call your local rapid-response number (e.g., 911) or an ambulance if the person you are caring for:

- Is unconscious
- Has unexplained chest pain or pressure
- Is having trouble breathing or is not breathing at all
- Has no pulse
- Is bleeding severely
- Is vomiting blood or bleeding from the rectum

- Has fallen and may have broken bones
- Has had a seizure
- Has a severe headache and/or slurred speech
- Has pressure or severe pain in the abdomen that does not go away
- Is unusually confused or disoriented

Also call for help if:

- Moving the person could cause further injury
- The person is too heavy for you to lift or help
- Traffic or distance would cause a life-threatening delay in getting to the hospital