

an emergency room

user guide

It's not always easy to know if a medical problem needs emergency care. In some situations, emergency medical treatment is a must. Other conditions are best dealt with by your family doctor or at a local health clinic.

How do you decide?

Understanding how an Emergency Room works may help you decide if you need to go there. When you arrive, a nurse will speak with you and decide the urgency and level of care you need:

1. Emergency

Heart attack, major trauma, severe head injury, amputation, severe breathing difficulty, unconsciousness, severe bleeding.

2. Urgent

Head injury without loss of consciousness, deep cut, foreign body in eyes/ears, high fever in an infant/toddler, chest pain, abdominal pain, serious infection.

3. Less Urgent

Possible fracture/sprain, back pain, headache/migraine, skin rash.

4. Non Urgent

Cold, flu, sore throat, sinus congestion, cut/bite.

If you think it's an emergency or urgent, don't hesitate!

How long will I wait?

Patients are seen by a doctor in order of need, not time of arrival. Arriving by ambulance does not always mean you will be seen sooner than other patients.

How long you wait will depend on:

- how urgently you need care
- how urgently others in the Emergency Room need care
- how busy the Emergency Room is when you arrive

Are there other choices?

Your family doctor or local health clinic may be a better choice to treat mild or chronic headaches, back pain, stomach pain; minor cuts or burns; colds, sore throat or sinus problems.

What else can I do?

- Ask about your family doctor's regular office hours and after-hours availability. Your doctor knows your family history best.
- Ensure you and your family have enough prescribed medication over holidays & weekends.
- If you have a chronic illness, keep your regularly scheduled appointments with your doctor. Be sure you understand your doctor's advice and ask what changes in your condition would require medical attention.

If you're not sure, call *Health Links* – staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week by registered nurses who can answer your questions.

**Call Health Links,
toll-free
1-888-315-9257**

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