

Getting Started as a Nurse

What to Expect During Nursing Orientation

One of the most important parts of your new nursing job is the nursing orientation. This is your opportunity to become familiar with the facility and procedures, to brush up on the skills you learned in nursing school, and to get comfortable with your colleagues.

Nursing Orientation: A Basic Overview

Orientation for nurses is your welcome to the world of nursing. Here, you can learn the procedures and policies of the facility while reviewing basic nursing skills. You may meet with administrators, doctors, and other nurses who may work with you on a regular basis. Nursing orientation may also include refreshers on infection control, safety, equipment, procedures, charting, computer software, and other required knowledge.

Some nursing orientation courses take a week, while others require more than that. Your orientation moves at a steady clip, and traditionally covers everything you need to know to launch your new nursing job.

Tips to Guide You through the Orientation

Nursing orientation doesn't have to be a nerve-wracking experience. There are numerous resources to help you prepare for those first few weeks. The better prepared you are, the more successful you should be.

- **Study the basics.** Review what you learned in nursing school. The more knowledgeable you are, the smoother your orientation should go.
- **Do your research.** Reading this guide is a very good start. There are also several books on the market that offer insight into all aspects of nursing, including nursing orientation.
- **Socialize.** Talk with fellow nurses who attend the orientation with you. When you break for lunch, invite someone to dine with you. You can compare notes.
- **Get the facts.** Each nursing orientation is different. If you can obtain an outline of what the orientation will entail, you are one step ahead of the game. If not, our guide about what to expect day-to-day can help ease your mind.



Nursing Orientation: What to Expect Day-by-Day

Though each orientation program is a bit different in terms of scheduling, they are in the same in their expectations of you. Here is a basic breakdown of what you might expect on a day-to-day basis.

- **Day One.** This day often covers the most basic things you need to know, such as security procedures, employment and benefits overview, and the initial "getting to know you" tour of the facilities.
- **Day Two.** Now it's time to learn more about the in-depth workings of the facility and what may be expected of you in the coming years. You might deal with basic required knowledge such as CPR, pressure ulcers, risk management, and be expected to show your proficiency in each.
- **Day Three.** On the third day, you may be introduced to laboratory services, the pharmacy, and other in-house resources. You might brush up on how to assess patients, how to catch the signs of serious illness such as a stroke or heart attack, and also show off your knowledge of infection control and procedures.
- **Day Four.** The fourth day of nursing orientation could delve into required skill sets, such as wound care, tube feedings, catheterizing, handling blood products, restraint systems, and more. This is when the first-year nurse has a chance to put those nursing school lessons into practice.
- **Day Five.** Expect more skill testing on the fifth day of your nursing orientation. You might deal with IV systems, pumps, injections, infusions, peer-to-peer reviews, and charting of what you've done.
- **Day Six.** By now you are moving into more serious procedures, such as insertion of a central line, PICC line, porta-caths, and other direct vein systems. You may review the care for each type, and learn how to chart it accurately. The review by day six may be intense, careful, and a good preparation for working on the floor.
- **Day Seven.** Many nursing orientation programs may have a day of refreshers on emergency procedures, such as inserting a chest tube, patient rescue, defibrillator use, and airway skills. You again chart what you do, which is good practice for what you do during the rest of your nursing career--charting everything!

A Final Word

During your nursing orientation, carry a pencil or pen and notebook with you. Take careful notes, and don't hesitate to speak up about any questions you might have. Nursing orientation is about getting the facts and easing into your new nursing job.

Finally, when you get nervous, remember this: If you made it through nursing school, you can definitely make it through nursing orientation.

10 Handy Tips for Your First Week of Nursing

When nursing orientation is over, you're on your own--but don't let that scare you! Soon you should be an experienced, seasoned nurse. In the meantime, let the nursing tips from the pros make your life easier.

When you were searching for nursing jobs, you projected a confident air--but now that you have the job, the nervousness might be setting in. Remember, every seasoned nurse was once a first-time nurse who felt unsure of everything. Everyone has to start somewhere!

Get a jump-start on your first week with these handy nursing tips.

1. **Get to work 30 minutes early.** By getting on the floor early, you can have plenty of time to prepare for your shift. The nurse you are switching shifts with should appreciate the chance to clock out right on time, and neither of you will feel rushed as you go over charts and discuss patients.
2. **Need help? Ask!** No question is too dumb to ask. Never hesitate to make certain you've got it right. After all, you have a responsibility to your patients to make sure your job is done correctly.
3. **Listen carefully.** Sometimes physicians can give orders so quickly and it could be hard to keep up. If you don't understand, make them slow down and go over it, but don't second-guess the doctors. Part of your nursing job involves carrying out the orders of the physician, even if you feel another course of action might be best.
4. **Write it down.** Nurses are always busy. By the time you sit down to chart, you might have forgotten when you gave a certain medication, or what a patient's vitals were an hour ago. Keep a notepad and pen with you and write down everything as you do it. Don't take the chance of forgetting!
5. **Move quietly.** Talk in low tones, keep a calm demeanor, and don't move too quickly around patients. Staying slow and methodical is the way to ensure you do everything correctly. Speaking with a friendly and soft voice is a courtesy for your sick and healing patients, and they should be grateful for it.
6. **Be yourself--and be confident!** You've gone through nursing school and you've earned the title of Nurse. Be confident in your abilities, and recognize that what you don't know, you will quickly figure out. Don't put up a front! Let your genuine personality shine through. Your patients and colleagues will respond well to it.



7. **Step up to the plate.** Is there a job that needs to be done? Don't wait until someone delegates it to you. Volunteer to do it, and then jump right on it! Your fellow nurses should appreciate your helpfulness.
8. **Learn names.** Everyone likes to feel appreciated. You can endear yourself to your new colleagues by learning their names. It might seem like a small thing, but it shows you do care. And don't forget to smile as you ask about their day!
9. **Don't complain.** Are you feeling overwhelmed? Don't complain--instead, find a way to solve the problem. Ask "Is there another way of doing this?" or "Is there something I'm missing?" If you approach the problem with a calm and patient attitude, your fellow nurses are likely to do anything they can to help you out!
10. **Be part of the team.** Offer to help when someone needs a hand, and don't hesitate to ask for advice. Pay attention to the dynamics of the team, always do a thorough job, and make good nursing your goal. Soon you should be a valued member of the team, and your first-week nervousness will be long-gone.

The Most Important Nursing Tip

There is one more tip to remember. It might be the simplest, but it is also one of the toughest to take to heart: Be patient with yourself!

Don't feel like you're quite up to speed? That's because you're probably not--yet. So relax! You are working with nurses who have been around for years, and they already know the ropes. They won't expect you to figure it out during the first week, or even the first month. Remember that they have been there, and they understand.

So give yourself a break, keep your eyes and ears open, and soak up all the knowledge you can. Before you know it, *you* will be one of those experienced nurses showing the first-year nurses the ropes.



Nursing Tips for Working with Doctors

Many decades ago, the relationship between a doctor and a nurse was very simple: the doctor gave the orders, and the nurse followed them. Since then, nursing has evolved and the nurse-physician relationship has become more of a partnership, driven by careful communication and assessment of the patients under their care.

The Nurse-Physician Relationship: What it Means for Patients

The nurse-physician relationship is important to workplace satisfaction. Studies have shown that the happier nurses are in their jobs, the more the patients benefit. A respectful, nurturing relationship between nurses and doctors can make all the difference in effective patient care.

According to Suzanne Gordon, author of *Nursing Against the Odds*, 75 to 80 percent of medical mistakes are caused by human error, and much of that comes from miscommunication. Fostering a positive atmosphere of open communication between doctors and physicians can ensure your patients get better as fast as possible.

Working with Doctors: What to Expect

When you're a first-year nurse, you aren't expected to know everything within the first week, or even the first month. Take advantage of it! When the doctor talks, you should make a point of listening to every word. Write down what is discussed, and ask questions about anything that you don't understand.



You may have to earn the trust of the physicians you work with. Doing this means being honest about what you know and what you don't, showing an active interest in patient treatment, and paying attention to the orders given.

For the first several weeks, you may be paired with a mentor nurse, one who serves as the middleman between you and the doctor. Eventually you should be on your own. By that point, you should know quite a bit about dealing with doctors, but you might still run into a few bumps on the road.

How to Handle the "Snappy" Doctor

Nurses do take orders from doctors, but that does not mean you should be a pushover! If a physician is short-tempered or snappy with you, don't snap back. Recognize that they are stressed out, and stay calm, even if you are chomping at the bit to respond in kind.

At the end of the shift, approach them privately and ask if there is a problem. Your directness should score major respect, and make the doctor think twice before snapping at you in the future.

Nursing Tips for a Smooth Transition

Sometimes doctors and nurses don't see eye-to-eye. Try to find a common ground and understand the doctor's position, but also remember that you are your patient's advocate.

Effective and complete patient care is the ultimate goal for everyone.

If you find yourself at odds with a physician over a patient's care, remember the following points:

- **If something doesn't feel or look right, speak up.** Many medical mistakes made by doctors, such as errors in writing prescriptions, are caught by nurses.
- **Stick to the facts.** Don't attack a doctor for making a call you think is wrong. Instead, stick to what you know is true: "The patient's blood pressure is not looking good" might be a fact, and is a much better opener than "Shouldn't you give them more medication?"
- **Keep disagreements private.** If you don't agree with a call the doctor has made, ask for a briefing with the physician in private. Never say anything that could undermine the patient's confidence in their doctor!
- **Share information.** The world of medicine moves fast, and keeping up with all the advances and recommendations can be tough. Share information as you learn it, so you and the physicians are on the same page with regard to drug interactions, new techniques, and up-to-date recommendations on patient care.
- **Focus on being a team.** Communicate with respect and work together to find a solution that is in the patient's best interest. Offer solutions, not complaints.
- **Be willing to make noise.** If a physician blows off your concerns or seems too busy to deal with it, approach the nurse manager or someone else who might be able to serve as a middleman. Explain your concerns clearly, stick to the facts, and ask for help.



When you are discussing a patient's care and feel strongly on a certain point, be ready to explain yourself. The physician may often take the time to listen and consider your rationale before making a final decision.

As your patient's advocate, you are in the perfect position to foster compromise and keep peace on the floor, so use that power wisely!