



To Our Patients: Patient Safety Tips



SPEAK UP!!!

The safety of healthcare is enhanced by the involvement of the patient as a partner in the healthcare process. **You as the patient, play a large role in ensuring your medical safety.** It is important that you provide complete and accurate information about your medical history, the signs and symptoms of your illness, your perceived risks in your care, and other matters relating to your health. You are also responsible for reporting any unexpected changes in your condition to your healthcare provider.

WHAT CAN YOU DO? BE INVOLVED IN YOUR HEALTH CARE

1. **The single most important way you can help to prevent errors is to be an active member of your health care team.**

That means taking part in every decision about your health care. Research shows that patients who are more involved with their care tend to get better results. Some specific tips, based on the latest scientific evidence about what works best, follow.

Medicines

2. **Make sure that all of your doctors know about everything you are taking. This includes prescription and over-the-counter medicines, and dietary supplements such as vitamins and herbs.**
3. **Make sure your doctor knows about any allergies and adverse reactions you have had to medicines.**
4. **Ask for information about your medicines in terms you can understand – both when your medicines are prescribed and when you receive them.**
 - What is the medicine for?
 - How am I supposed to take it, and for how long?
 - What side effects are likely? What do I do if they occur?
 - Is this medicine safe to take with other medicines or dietary supplements I am taking?

- What food, drink, or activities should I avoid while taking this medicine?
 - Make sure you can read the prescriptions
- 5. When you pick up your medicine from the pharmacy, ask: Is this the medicine that my doctor prescribed?**
 - 6. If you have any questions about the directions on your medicine labels, ask.**

Medicine labels can be hard to understand. For example, ask if “four doses daily” means taking a dose every 6 hours around the clock or just during regular waking hours.
 - 7. Ask your pharmacist for the best device to measure your liquid medicine. Also, ask questions if you are not sure how to use it.**
 - 8. Ask for written information about the side effects your medicine could cause.**

Hospital Stays

- 9. If you are in a hospital, consider asking all health care workers who have direct contact with you whether they have washed their hands.**

Hand washing is an important way to prevent the spread of infections in hospitals.
- 10. When you are being discharged from the hospital, have the treatment plan you will use at home explained to you.**

This includes learning about your medicines and finding out when you can get back to your regular activities.

Surgery

- 11. If you are having surgery, make sure that you, your doctor, and your surgeon all agree and are clear on exactly what will be done.**

It is always a good practice to verify the type of surgery you will have done and the body part on which you will be operated with all caregivers you interact with prior to surgery. The American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons urges its members to sign their initials directly on the orthopedic site to be operated on before surgery.

“SPEAK UP!”

Speak up if you have questions or concerns, and if you do not understand, ask again. It is your body and you have a right to know.

Pay attention to the care you are receiving. Make sure you are getting the right treatments and medications by the right health care professionals. Do not assume anything.

Educate yourself about your diagnosis, the medical tests you are undergoing, and your treatment plan.

Ask a trusted family member or friend to be your advocate.

Know what medications you take and why you take them. Medication errors are the most common health care errors.

Use a hospital, clinic, surgery center, or other type of health care organization that has undergone a rigorous on-site evaluation against established state-of-the-art quality and safety standards, such as that provided by JCAHO.

Participate in all decisions about your treatment. You are the center of the health care team.

Other Steps You Can Take

1. Know that “more” is not always better. It is a good idea to find out why a test or treatment is needed and how it can help you.
2. If you have a test, do not assume that no news is good news. Ask about the results.

More Information

Treatment recommendations based on the latest scientific evidence are available from the National Guidelines Clearinghouse at <http://www.guideline.gov>. Ask your doctor if your treatment is based on the latest evidence.

This information is edited and printed with permission from www.ahrg.gov and www.jcaho.org.

Director of Patient Safety
Hunterdon Medical Center
908-788-6144