

# TIPS TO HELP PREVENT MEDICAL ERRORS

Medical errors happen, whether at a hospital, surgery center, physician's office or at the pharmacy. Errors result from incorrect medications, misdiagnosis, surgery mishaps, unnecessary care, defective medical devices or lab reports. Poor communication is typically the top culprit on why the most common medical errors occur, a problem that can be easily avoidable. The following tips can help you and family members receive safe care when seeking healthcare services. Many of these tips come from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.<sup>1</sup>

## MEDICATIONS



### Inform Your Doctor(s)

- "Brown bag" all of your meds to your doctor(s) – to ensure each doctor is up-to-date on your medication records. This includes over-the-counter meds and dietary supplements – such as vitamins and herbs.
- Another option is to type up a complete list of your current medications, including dosage and instructions. Annotate past surgeries with dates.
- Share with your doctor(s) any allergies or adverse reactions you have had to medicines.



### Learn About your Newly-Prescribed Medication

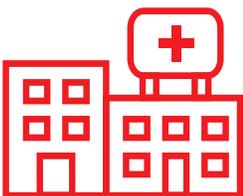
- If your doctor writes a new prescription for you, make sure you can read it – clarify the spelling and dosage.
- Questions to ask your doctor about the new prescription:
  - » What is the medicine for?
  - » How should it be taken, for how long, best time of day?
  - » Are there any side effects to the medication?
  - » Is the medication safe to take with other medications?
  - » What food, drink, or activities should be avoided when using this medicine?



### Talking with Pharmacist

- When picking up the medicine at your pharmacy, confirm this is the correct medication prescribed by your doctor. Most common medicine errors involved the wrong drug or the wrong dose.
- Clarify with pharmacy the directions on the label – such as frequency of dose, time of day, refrigeration, etc.
- If the medicine is liquid, ask pharmacist about the best device to measure the medicine – e.g. true teaspoon vs. household teaspoon.

## HOSPITAL STAYS



- If you have a choice of hospitals, choose a hospital where many patients have had the procedure or surgery you need. Research demonstrates that hospitals that perform more of the same procedures provide better results.
- Speak up if you have questions or concerns – it is your right as a patient.

<sup>1</sup>Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. *20 Tips to Help Prevent Medical Errors*.



### Before Surgery

- If you are unsure about your diagnosis, especially if it requires surgery, you can ask for a second-opinion by another provider. Diagnostic error is the most common type of medical error.
- If having surgery, make sure that your doctor and surgeon all agree on exactly what will be done – such as which surgery site (e.g. right or left knee, etc). Wrong-site surgery is 100 percent preventable.



### How to Research a Surgeon

- You can find helpful background information on physicians and surgeons by logging on to the Federation of State Medical Boards website: ([www.fsmb.org](http://www.fsmb.org)). From this, you can follow a four-step process to research a surgeon:
  1. Confirm state credentials
  2. Confirm surgical certification
  3. Uncover professional reprimands (fee may be required)
  4. Check ratings, number of procedures performed and complication rates.



### Additional patient resources can be found below:

- » Leapfrog Hospital Survey Results – <http://www.leapfroggroup.org/compare-hospitals>
- » CMS Hospital Compare – <https://www.medicare.gov/hospitalcompare/search.html?>
- » Why Not The Best – <http://www.whynotthebest.org/>
- » Consumer Reports – <https://www.consumerreports.org/doctors/doctors-and-hospitals-reviews-ratings/>
- » HealthGrades – <https://www.healthgrades.com/>
- » U.S. News and World Report – <https://health.usnews.com/best-hospitals/rankings>
- » Amino – <https://amino.com/>
- » Surgeon Ratings by Consumers' Checkbook– <http://www.checkbook.org/surgeonratings/>
- » Propublica Surgeon Scorecard – <https://projects.propublica.org/surgeons/>



### Take Responsibility as Engaged Patient

- Have a family member or friend with you as your advocate. They can ask questions, observe the care you are given and take notes. They can also ensure that your care is coordinated properly during nurse shift changes.
- Make sure that someone – your primary care doctor or a family member – has your important health information. Make no assumptions that everyone has all the information they need.
- Hand washing – To prevent the spread of infections, ask healthcare staff who will be in contact with you whether they have washed their hands.
- More is not always better. If a test or treatment will be given, find out why it is needed and how it can help you. You might be better off without it.
- Learn more about your condition and treatments through your doctor and nurse – ask your doctor if your treatment is based on the latest evidence of care.
- After receiving a test, ask how and when you will get the results.
- When being discharged from the hospital, ask your doctor to explain the treatment plan you will follow at home, e.g.: using new medications, continuing previous medications, scheduling follow-up appointments, and resuming regular activities.