



Ten Tips for Safer Healthcare

Information for Patients & Families

1. **Be actively involved in your own health care**

Taking part in decisions that are made about your treatment is the single most important way to help prevent things from going wrong and to get the best possible care for your needs.

2. **Speak up if you have any questions or concerns**

Choose a health care professional with whom you feel comfortable talking about your health and treatment. Remember that you have a right to ask questions and to expect answers that you can understand. Your health care professional wants to answer your questions, but can only answer them if you ask. A family member, carer or interpreter can be there with you if this will help. If you want to, you can always ask for another professional opinion.

Ask: *I'm not sure I understand what you said...*

I'm worried that...

Could you please explain that to me again?

Can I come back with my family to talk about this again?

3. **Learn more about your condition or treatments by asking your doctor or nurse and by using other reliable sources of information**

It's a good idea to collect as much reliable information as you can about your condition, tests and treatments.

Ask: *Can you please tell me more about my condition?*

How sure are you that I have this condition?

Do you have any information that I can take away with me?

Can you tell me where I can find out more?

Why do I need to have this particular test?

What are the different treatments for this condition?

How will this treatment help me?

Is this treatment based on the latest scientific evidence?

What are the risks of this treatment?

What is likely to happen if I don't have this treatment?

What does the treatment involve?

What should I look out for?

What can I do to help myself?

When should I come back to see you?

4. **Keep a list of all the medications you are taking**

You can use the list to let your doctor and pharmacist know about everything you are taking, and about any drug allergies you may have. Remember to include prescriptions, over-the-counter medicines and complementary medicines (such as vitamins and herbs) on your list.

5. **Make sure you understand the medicines you are taking**

When you get your medicine, read the label, including the warnings. Make sure it is what your doctor ordered for you.

Ask: *Do you have any written information about this medicine?*

What do the directions on the label mean?

How much should I take, and when should I take it?

What are the common side effects?

What should I look out for?

How long before it starts to work?

Will this medicine interact with the other medicines that I'm taking?

Are there any foods or other things that I should avoid while I'm on this medicine?

How long do I need to take this medicine?

6. Make sure you get the results of any test or procedure

If you don't get the results when expected, don't assume 'no news is good news'. Call your doctor to find out your results, and ask what they mean for your care.

7. Talk to your doctor or other health care professional about your options if you need to go into hospital

Most hospitals do a good job at treating a wide range of problems. Other hospitals specialise in particular areas, such as, heart bypass surgery. Become involved in decisions about your hospital treatment by discussing your options with your health care professionals.

Ask: *How quickly do I need to have this treatment?*

Is there an option to have the surgery/procedure done as a day patient?

Is there more than one hospital to choose from?

If so, which has the best care and results for treating my condition?

8. Make sure you understand what will happen if you need surgery or a procedure

Ask your doctor or surgeon exactly what the procedure will involve and who will be in charge of your care when you're in hospital. If you want, your general practitioner or other health care professional can help you find out what you need to know.

Remember to tell the surgeon, anaesthetist and nurses, if you have allergies or have ever had a bad reaction to an anaesthetic or any other drug.

Ask: *How will having this surgery/procedure help me?*

What are the possible risks, and what are the chances of these happening?

What will happen if I don't have this surgery/procedure?

Are there other ways that this condition could be treated or managed?

Who will be doing the surgery/procedure?

What will it involve and how long will it take?

How can I expect to feel during recovery?

What will happen after the surgery/procedure?

Who will be in charge of my care while I'm in hospital?

How long will I be in hospital?

What is the total cost of having this surgery/procedure?

9. Make sure you, your doctor and your surgeon all agree on exactly what will be done during the operation

You should confirm with your doctor and your surgeon the operation to be performed as close as possible to it happening.

Doing surgery on the wrong site (eg operating on the left knee rather than the right) or doing the wrong operation (eg removing the appendix instead of the gall bladder) are both extremely rare – but even once is too often. The good news is that many professional organisations are encouraging surgeons to adopt measures to reduce the risk of wrong-site surgery.

10. Before you leave hospital, ask your doctor or other health care professionals to explain the treatment plan you will use at home

Doctors can sometimes think that their patients understand more than they really do about their continuing treatment and follow-up after they are discharged home from hospital.

Ask: *Who will be following up on my care and when do I need to see them?*

How long will I be taking this medicine?

Will I require physiotherapy or other rehabilitation services?

When can I return to work?

When can I play sport?

When can I drive?

Will I be given a written summary of my care to pass on to my GP?

Remember to visit your GP as soon as possible after you are discharged.