



X-Plain™

Patient Safety - Introduction

Reference Summary

Introduction

The American healthcare system is one of the most advanced in the world. However, errors do happen which may cause prolonged sickness and even death.

Many things can cause errors. Miscommunication, spread of infection, and failure of patients to understand and follow instructions are the most important factors affecting safety at hospitals and medical centers. You can do a lot to help reduce errors and improve your safety during your stay at the hospital, medical center, or other healthcare facility.

This reference summary discusses some of the things you can do to ensure your safety and guard against errors.



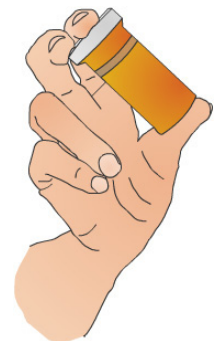
Communication

A big part of the diagnosis and treatment you receive is based on what you say to your doctors and nurses. Do not assume that everyone on your healthcare team knows your medical history. You need to repeat it and fill them in.

You should be ready to answer many questions. In some cases, you have to volunteer the information without being asked. For instance, if you have a pacemaker say, “I have a pacemaker.” Do not wait until your doctor asks you, “Do you have a pacemaker?” because he or she may not.

The following are some important pieces of information you need to share

- Are you taking any prescription medications?
- Are you taking any non-prescription medications?
- Medications could interact with anesthesia or could cause excessive bleeding during surgery. Therefore, it is very



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important to tell your doctor about any medications you are taking, even over-the-counter medications, such as aspirin, Advil[®], or herbal supplements.

- Do you have any allergies to drug or food groups? If yes, what are you allergic to?
- Are you allergic to latex? (Latex is a rubbery substance found in many hospital and surgical tools.)
- Have you had anesthesia before? If so, were you allergic to any anesthetic drug? Do you know if any blood-relative of yours has had problems with anesthesia?
- Have you had surgery before? If yes, what type of surgery?
- Tell your doctor about any medical problems that you may have such as heart, lung, or kidney problems, strokes, or liver damage.
- Previous blood transfusions, diabetes, high blood pressure, jaundice, depression, and other psychiatric disorders should also be reported to your anesthesiologist.
- You should also inform your doctor and healthcare provider if you smoke, drink alcohol or take recreational drugs. Some precautions may need to be taken to prevent you from suffering from withdrawal symptoms after the surgery.
- It is also important to tell your doctor whether you have snoring problems, and whether you have any loose teeth or dental work, such as bridges or crowns.



Your doctors and nurses expect you to ask questions. If you don't understand what someone is telling you, simply ask. If you still don't understand, ask again.

If a treatment or medication is different from what you were expecting, ask about it.

For instance, if you have been taking an orange pill for a while but you are now given a green one instead, find out why before you take it. Ask, for instance, "Why is this pill different from the one I took before?"

Asking simple questions can prevent harmful mistakes.

In order to not forget your medical conditions, previous surgeries, or the medications you are taking, you can make a list of them, and update it regularly. This will be your medical history. Having this document typed or in an electronic format, will allow you to share information with your healthcare providers easily.



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It is also helpful to make a list of your symptoms, such as pain, numbness, or weakness. Ask yourself: When did they start? How long do they last? What triggers them? What makes them better? You may have to answer all of these questions in order to help your healthcare providers determine what is wrong, and how it should be treated.

Patient Advocate

Illness is a stressful time for patients, and you are not at your best when you are sick. Immediately after surgery and other serious medical treatment, your judgment may be impaired.

Consider bringing a patient advocate to help you receive the best healthcare.

A patient advocate can be a family member, such as a spouse or a child, or a close friend who will act as your supporter, backer, or spokesperson. Some hospitals may have professionals, called Patient Representatives or Patient Advocates, who play this role.

Patient advocates are not only for serious medical treatments that can impair your judgment. If you think you are not likely to fully understand your doctor, bring a friend or a family member as your patient advocate. We don't always catch everything our doctors tell us or we forget to ask questions.

Bring a person you trust and tell your doctor that it is okay to share your health information with your patient advocate. Your doctor cannot share this information without your permission.

If you are concerned about not being able to make healthcare decisions during your treatment, then learn about durable power of attorney for healthcare and advance medical directives.

These legal documents allow your advocate to make health decisions that match your values and priorities when you are unable to make them for yourself.

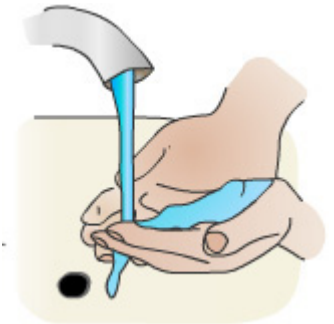


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Preventing Infection

Infections can occur after many types of medical procedures. There are many things you can do to help prevent infections.

- Wash your hands carefully after handling any type of soiled material. This is especially important after you have gone to the bathroom.
- Be sure that everyone you have contact with washes his or her hands before and after working with you. Do not be afraid to remind nurses and doctors about this—they do get busy and sometimes forget. They will appreciate your concern!
- If you have an intravenous catheter, keep the skin around the dressing clean and dry. Tell your nurse right away if the dressing works loose or gets wet.
- Also, if you have a dressing on a wound, let your nurse know right away if it works loose or gets wet.
- And if you have any type of catheter or drainage tube, let your nurse know right away if it becomes loose or comes out.
- If you have diabetes, be sure that you and your doctor discuss the best way to control your blood sugar before, during, and after your hospital stay. High blood sugar increases the risk of infection.
- If possible, ask your friends and relatives not to visit if they feel sick.
- If you are a smoker, you should consider a smoking cessation program. This will reduce the chance of lung infection while in the hospital and may also improve your ability to heal after surgery.
- If you are overweight, losing weight will reduce the risk of infection following surgery.



Self-care Instructions

During your stay at the hospital, carefully follow your doctor's instructions regarding treatment and getting out of bed. Do not be afraid to ask for help or sufficient pain medications.

When you are ready to leave the hospital you will be given special instructions called "discharge instructions." The



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nurse and other staff should explain them to you. Make sure you have written instructions too so you can take them home and review them.

Make sure you understand every single instruction. Ask questions if you don't understand what is being said. Discuss any concerns about your safety with your healthcare team. Clarify bathing instructions with your doctor. Can you take a sponge bath, shower, or tub bath? Ask if there are specific foods you should eat or avoid eating.



If it is not clear when you should take a medication, ask about the medication schedule, and dosage. If you are worried that the medications may interact with another drug you are taking, ask questions.

After being in a hospital your medications and their schedule may change. Make sure your healthcare providers explain why and how you should take new medications and, just as importantly, why they stopped some of the medications you were taking before you came to the hospital. It is not unheard of for a doctor or a nurse to forget to re-prescribe a medication that you were on before you came to the hospital.

Your doctor will tell you when you should go back to your everyday routine. If you have questions about when you can drive, make love, cook, clean, or do any other activity, ask.

If you have to give yourself injections or take care of a medical device, your nurse will show you how to do this. In order to be confident that you can do it on your own, make sure you practice in front of your nurse if you need to.

Your discharge instructions will include when you should call the doctor if something goes wrong. Ask questions if you don't understand the signs of "things going wrong."

Write down the names and office telephone numbers of the doctors you need to schedule an appointment with after you go home. Find out whether you need to call for an appointment or whether the appointment has already been scheduled for you.

Your discharge instructions may include an appointment for a follow-up visit. Understand the reason for each appointment and what information you need to bring with you.

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Share your discharge instructions with your primary care or family doctor. Make sure to give his or her name and address to the doctors you saw in the hospital and ask them to send a discharge summary to your primary care or family doctor.

The discharge summary will let your primary care or family doctor know what happened during your hospital stay, your new diagnoses, your new medications, your new allergies and your treatment plan.

Safety At Home

After having surgery or other medical treatments that affect the levels of your consciousness and energy, you will need help caring for yourself when you go home. Plan ahead and organize a schedule of helpers with your family and friends.

Make your home safer by avoiding climbing steps until you regain energy. Plan to have your bedroom on a floor with a bathroom if possible.

The following home safety tips are helpful any time, but they are critical after returning home from the hospital:

- Use night-lights in tricky, dark areas to prevent falls at night.
- Place the telephone and emergency telephone numbers near you.
- Keep hallways, stairways, and pathways clear of clutter.
- Wear snug fitting, non-slip, low-heeled shoes or slippers.



Schedule quiet time for yourself and remember to rest and give your body time to heal.

Medication Safety

You are part of your healthcare team every time you take your medications. It is very important that you double-check that you are taking your medications right. To do this, you need to know as much as possible about your medications.

When dropping off prescriptions or requesting refills, tell your pharmacist all the medications and over-the-counter drugs you are taking. He or she will help you find out if there are any



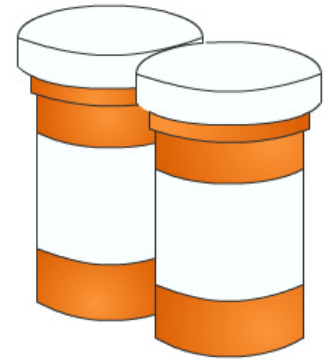
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harmful drug interactions.

Learn to recognize the medications you take. Learn their colors, shapes, and any symbols or marks printed on them. Certain medications have different colors for different dosages. Liquids usually have a unique scent.

When picking up your medications at your pharmacy, open the bottle and look at the medications to confirm that the medications are marked with the correct drug name and strength.

If there is no mark, ask the pharmacist to check that they were dispensed from the right bottle.



All new prescriptions must be dispensed with verbal and written pharmacist instructions. When receiving medications, make sure you understand the following information:

- What did your physician tell you the medication was for?
- What are the brand and generic names? (The brand name is the name given to the medication by the manufacturer. The generic name is the chemical name of the medication.)
- What will the medicine do?
- How many times a day should you take the medicine?
- How many pills should you take at one time?
- How long should you take the medicine?
- How should you take the medication, with liquid or without anything?
- When should you take the medication, with meals, before meals or after meals?

Understand what to expect from the medication:

- What results should you look for?
- What are the potential side effects?
- How can you recognize a side effect?
- What should you do about side effects if they happen?

Make sure you know how you should store the medication. Check if refills are necessary and if your doctor's prescription includes refills.

It is helpful to maintain a list of all your medications. This list will help you stay organized and will make it easy for you to share information about your medications with your doctors and pharmacist.

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If you miss a dose, do not assume you can double the next scheduled dose. Ask your doctor or pharmacist what you should do if you miss a dose.

Conclusion

You can help your healthcare team protect your safety and avoid errors and misunderstanding. Remember these 7 points:

1. Give information to your healthcare team about you and your health.
2. Ask questions to make sure you understand what you are being told.
3. Bring an advocate if you need help talking to your doctors or nurses.
4. Keep your hands and wounds clean and remind your caregivers to have clean hands too.
5. Understand and follow the instructions given to you while at the hospital as well as when you leave.
6. Plan for going back home by scheduling helpers and making your home safe from falls and accidents.
7. Ask your pharmacist for medication instructions and make sure you understand them.



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