



Personal Medical Information

SafeTips from the Naval Safety Center

Quick and easy summaries to find out about something new you're doing or as a refresher for something you haven't done in a while. They're a great training tool to pass around at meetings, through e-mail, or post on bulletin boards.

According to estimates in a report by the Institute of Medicine, between 44,000 and 98,000 people die in American hospitals each year as the result of mishaps and avoidable errors. Medical errors can happen in hospitals, outpatient surgery centers, doctors' offices, nursing homes, pharmacies and in your own home. The errors can involve medicine, surgery, diagnosis, equipment and lab reports. Some errors are because of the complexity of modern health care, but others happen when doctors and their patients have problems communicating. Patients who aren't involved or informed usually don't help their doctor or treatment succeed.

1. Get actively involved. Ask questions whenever you are curious or concerned. Make a list of questions for your doctor so that you'll be less likely to forget.
2. Take part in every decision about your health care.
3. Tell your doctor about everything you are taking: prescriptions, over-the-counter medicine, and vitamins.
4. If you are taking numerous medications or have been taking some for a long time, bring them all to your doctor once a year so that he or she can evaluate them and make sure your records are up to date.
5. Make sure your doctor knows about any allergies and adverse reactions you have had to medicines.
6. When your doctor writes you a prescription, make sure you can read it. This will help ensure that a pharmacist can read it, also.

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7. Get information about medicines and make sure you understand it:

- ⇒ What is it for?
- ⇒ How do you take it, and for how long?
- ⇒ Are there side effects? What do you do if they occur?
- ⇒ Is the medicine safe to take with other medicines or dietary supplements?
- ⇒ What food, drink or activities should you avoid while taking this medicine?

8. Always know what medicines you are taking and why.

9. If you have been in the hospital, make sure you understand the plan for follow-up treatments when you are discharged. What medicine will you be taking? When can you return to normal activities?

10. If you're having surgery, make sure you understand exactly what will be done. Know exactly what is being done and which side of your body is the target. Doctors and hospitals can use a "patient education diagram" to help make this clear.

11. Do not assume that everyone knows everything they need to know.

12. If you have a test done, ask about the results.

13. Expect that all of your care providers will wash their hands prior to caring for you.

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