



Medicine Safety Tips at the Hospital

Going to the hospital may be very stressful whether it is a planned visit or an unplanned visit. This may be due to not knowing what to expect, feeling like you do not have control over the situation, or having negative experience during a previous encounter. However, some of the tips listed below can help ease some of the stress you may have about going to the hospital.

Here's What You Can Do

- ✓ **Bring a list of all the medicines you take.** Keep an accurate and updated list of all the medicines you take. Bring it with you to the hospital and share it with your doctors and nurses upon admission. Be sure your list includes prescription medicines, over-the-counter (OTC) products, herbals, vitamins, and dietary supplements. Also, include topical creams, ointments, medicines that are in pens or are patches, and eye and ear drops. Do not forget medicine(s) that you take on occasion or as needed (such as a rescue inhaler).
- ✓ **Review your list with medicines you are given in the hospital.** Ask your doctor or nurse what medicines you are receiving while you are a patient. You may be given different medicines than what you normally take at home. Sometimes different medicines will be needed to help treat the medical reason for you being in the hospital. Also, some of the medicines you normally take at home may not be needed while you are in the hospital. Do not be afraid to ask about the medicines you are being given.
- ✓ **Keep your patient identification band (ID) on.** Always make sure you are wearing your hospital ID band. The ID band typically has your name, medical record number, and a barcode that has other important information about you. Healthcare workers will use your ID band to make sure they have the right person before a procedure is done or medicine is given to you. The nurse may scan the barcode on your ID band before giving you medicine. It is important to also state your name and your date of birth while your ID band is being checked.
- ✓ **Make sure you are given the right medicine.** Any time you are given a medicine, the nurse should tell you the name of the drug, the dose, and what it is for (in general terms) before you take it. The medicine should be labeled when it is brought to you. It should also have a barcode on it that should be scanned to make sure it is the right medicine intended for you. If it is a new medicine or something you have never heard of, ask questions. If you received the medicine before and it looks different, do not be afraid to ask why it looks different. This will help prevent errors if the medicine somehow got mixed up.





- ✓ **Call for the nurse if a medicine pump beeps.** Never attempt to turn off a pump or allow visitors to touch the pump. Doing so can cause the medicine to be given too fast, too slow, or stopped completely.
- ✓ **Do not let anyone press your pain pump button.** Pain medicines are sometimes given through pumps (known as a PCA pump). The PCA pump is connected to tubing that goes directly into your vein. When you are in pain, you press the button on the PCA and a dose of medicine will go through the tubing into your vein. The button should only be pressed by you when you are in pain. Do not allow anyone else to press the button for you. If you are not in pain, you do not need to press the button. If other people press the button for you, you may receive too much pain medicine that can lead to an overdose.
- ✓ **Review your discharge instructions.** You should receive discharge instructions and a list of medicines to take once you get home. If you were taking medicines before going to the hospital, check to see if you will be taking the same medicines once you get home. Sometimes the dose you previously were taking has changed, a new medicine was added, or a medicine you were taking before going to the hospital has been stopped. Make sure you understand which medicines you need to take and those that you need to stop taking. Also, find out when you received the last dose of medicine and when you need to start taking it. You may need to ask for new prescriptions so that you have the correct medicine and dose when you get home.
- ✓ **Bring an advocate.** Some hospitalized patients are either unable to participate in their own care due to illness or some type of other physical limitation. If this occurs, try to arrange for a close friend or family member to stay with you. This individual can help you keep track of the medicines being administered to you during your hospital stay. They can also help confirm your identity before the nurse gives you any medicine.
- ✓ **Let the medical team know about any allergies and the type of reaction(s) you have.** Your medical team will need to know if you have any allergies to medicines and what type of reaction you have. Sometimes people confuse side effects as allergy to medicine. For example, some medicines may make you feel sick to your stomach especially if you have not eaten anything. So, your medical team can make sure it is a true allergy. In addition, let your medical team know if you are allergic to food, latex, intravenous dye (may be used during special tests), and so on, and what type of reaction you have. It is important to keep a list of all your allergies with your list of medicines.
- ✓ **Discuss alcohol and other substance use.** Your doctors and nurses will ask you whether you drink alcohol or use any substances, such as marijuana, or prescription medicines that have not been prescribed to you. This information will remain confidential. However, it is important for your overall care. In addition, you should tell your doctors if you have been taking more than the prescribed amount medicine. For example, if you are taking larger doses of pain medicine or taking it more frequently, and how long you have been taking more of it. Higher doses of medicine, and the use of alcohol and other drugs may interfere with the medicines you will be receiving during your hospital stay.