

Why is Patient Safety Important?

“Medical errors are one of the Nation’s leading causes of death and injury.” More people die from medical errors than from car accidents, breast cancer or AIDS.¹ So how can you protect yourself from medical errors?

You can protect yourself by being an active member of your health care team and:

- Making sure all of your doctors know every medicine you are taking. This includes prescription and over-the-counter medicines as well as vitamins and herbs.
- Making sure your doctor knows about any allergies and reactions you have had to drugs.
- Asking for information about your medicine in words you can understand. Ask questions when your doctor writes a prescription for you. Talk to your pharmacist when you pick up your prescription.
- Choosing a hospital, if possible, where many patients have had the same procedure or surgery you need.
- Making sure all the health care workers involved in your care are familiar with your health information.
- Asking all health care workers who touch you whether they have washed their hands.
- Asking a friend or family member to be with you in the hospital and speak up for you if you can’t.²
- Asking any consulting or specialty physician to communicate with your primary care physician so your care can be coordinated and duplicate tests and drug interactions can be avoided.

¹ Agency for Healthcare Research and Policy (AHRQ), 20 Tips to Help Prevent Medical Errors. Washington: GPO, 2000. Available at

<http://www.ahrq.gov/consumer/20tips.htm>.

² AHRQ, 20 Tips to Help Prevent Medical Errors.