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Tips to Help Prevent Medical Errors

Medicines

1. The single most important way you can help to prevent errors is to be an active member of your healthcare team.
2. Make sure that all of your doctors know about everything you are taking. This includes prescription and over-the-counter medicines, and dietary supplements such as vitamins and herbs.
3. Make sure your doctor knows about any allergies and adverse reactions you have to medicines.
4. When your doctor writes you a prescription, make sure you can read it.
5. Ask for information about your medicines in terms you can understand-both when your medicines are prescribed and when you receive them.
6. When you pick up your medicine from the pharmacy, ask: "is this the medicine that my doctor prescribed?"
7. If you have any questions about the directions on your medicine labels, ask.
8. Ask your pharmacist for the best device to measure your liquid medicine. Also, ask questions if you are not sure how to use it.
9. Ask for written information about the side effects your medicine could cause.

Hospital Stays

10. If you have a choice, choose a hospital at which many patients have had the procedure or surgery you need.
11. If you are in a hospital, consider asking all health-care workers who have direct contact with you whether they have washed their hands.
12. When you are being discharged from the hospital, ask your doctor to explain the treatment plan you will use at home.

Surgery

13. If you are having surgery, make sure that you, your doctor, and your surgeon all agree and are clear on exactly what will be done.

Other Steps You Can Take

14. Speak up if you have questions or concerns.
15. Make sure that someone, such as your personal doctor, is in charge of your care.
16. Make sure that all health professionals involved in your care have all important health information about you.
17. Ask a family member or friend to be there with you and to be your advocate.
18. Know that "more" is not always better.
19. If you have a test, do not assume that no news is good news.
20. Learn about your condition and treatments by asking your doctor and nurse and by using other reliable sources.

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