

AHA/HRET Top Ten Safety Tips for Hospital Patients and Families

Patients can help to ensure their own health and safety while in the hospital. These tips are designed to help you and your family take an active role in your care during a hospital stay.



1. Be an important partner in your care

	Share information about what is important to you.
	Ask questions about anything that is unclear.
	Participate in nurse change of shift report and daily physician rounds. Keep a list of questions you want to ask your doctors and nurses. During these bedside discussions, share information about how you are feeling. You know best how you are doing.

2. Speak up when you have concerns

	If you, your family or other care partners sense that something may not be right, or that a mistake might be happening, speak up right away.
	Report any concerns to a hospital staff member or supervisor as soon as possible , including the following situations: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• When you are feeling sicker or worse than before and the doctors or nurses have not noticed the change. You, your family or other care partner may be the first to notice a problem because you know what is normal for you and what is unusual.• If you feel that hospital caregivers are not listening to your concerns.
	Many hospitals have a hotline or emergency number for patients or families to report an urgent medical problem or concern , often referred to as a “rapid response” number. Ask about this number and use it if you need medical help right away.

3. Call, don't fall – always ask for help when getting out of bed

	While you are in the hospital, you may be more likely to fall because certain medications, and being in bed more than usual, can make you unsteady on your feet.
	Always call for help before you get up. Practice using the call button to make sure you know how to operate it. Keep items you need within reach, such as eyeglasses.
	Exercise while in bed to strengthen your muscles or walk when directed by your care team. Ask your hospital care team which exercises would be best for you. Family members or other care partners may be able to help.

4. Ask your care team to “remove the tube” as soon as possible

	Ask every day when it will be okay to remove your urinary tube, central line (intravenous catheter in the neck, shoulder or groin area) or breathing tube. The less time you have one of these tubes, the less chance there is of infection.
	If you do need a urinary tube, it is important to hang the bag lower than your stomach and make sure the tube does not twist. Never carry the bag on your lap when in a wheel chair or when you are being moved from one room to another.
	If you do need a breathing tube, keep the head of your bed raised to prevent saliva from collecting in your mouth. Your care team will also regularly clean your mouth with swabs to keep the germs away. Your family or other care partners can help by checking the head of the bed and learning how to use the mouth swabs. Let your care team know if the head of the bed is too low or flat.

5. Keep all hands clean - yours and theirs

	As a patient, always wash your own hands or use hand sanitizer before eating, after using the bathroom and when you return from any tests. Remind family members, other care partners and visitors to wash their hands when they enter or leave your room.
	Your care team should always wash or gel their hands in front of you before they touch you. It is okay to ask a doctor or nurse if they washed their hands.

6. Help prevent surgical complications

	Before surgery, follow any special bathing instructions your doctor provided. The special soap will kill germs on your skin and help prevent a surgical infection. If you were unable to follow the instructions, tell the hospital staff when you arrive for surgery or the day before surgery when they call you.
	You may be given an antibiotic to prevent infection. When you leave the hospital, be sure to take your medication at the appropriate time of day and for the entire duration specified by your doctor.

7. Keep your skin healthy to prevent bedsores

	Patients who cannot move in bed are at greater risk of getting bedsores. Family members or other care partners can help watch to make sure that you are being turned every two hours. Be sure to tell hospital staff if your sheets become damp or soiled.
	Keep your heels propped up so they are not resting on the bed when you are lying on your back.

8. Prevent blood clots in your legs

	Being in bed for long periods of time can lead to blood clots. If you must stay in bed, the doctor will order a blood thinner medication and/or special stockings or boots to put pressure on your legs. It is important to wear the stockings or boots so they can do their job.
	While in bed or in a chair, move your feet and ankles around in a circle and move your toes up and down like you are stepping on the gas pedal of a car. These movements will help with circulation.
	Talk to your doctor and nurses about when to begin walking. Walk as soon as you can and always call for help when getting up.
	Tell your nurse or doctor as soon as possible if you get swelling, redness, pain, burning or tenderness in the lower part of your leg, or if you feel short of breath while in the hospital. You may even experience these symptoms after you go home, up to one month after your hospital stay. Blood clots are life-threatening and need emergency attention.

9. Know your medications

	Give your health care team a list of the medications that you are currently taking. Keep a list for yourself, your family or other care partner.
	Share information about any allergies or medications that have not seemed to work for you.
	Ask your doctor or nurses to tell you the name of each medication you are taking and why you are taking it.

10. Prepare to leave the hospital

	Ask a family member or other care partner to learn with you about your medications, diet and anything else you need to know before you leave the hospital.
	Make sure you know which medications to take and which ones you no longer need. Know why you are taking each medication. Ask your doctor if you should continue taking any medication you were taking before your hospital stay.
	Make sure you know how to take each medication, when and for how long.
	Learn about health problems that may be cause for concern after you leave the hospital. Make sure you know who to contact if these problems do occur.