

8. continued

You may wish to ask:

*How will having this surgery/procedure help me?
What are the possible risks, and what are the chances of these happening?*

What will happen if I don't have this surgery/procedure?

Are there other ways that this condition could be treated or managed?

Who will be doing the surgery/procedure?

What will it involve and how long will it take?

How can I expect to feel during recovery?

What will happen after the surgery/procedure?

Who will be in charge of my care while I'm in hospital?

What is the total cost of having this surgery/procedure?

9. Make sure you, your doctor and your surgeon all agree on exactly what will be done during your operation

Although surgery on the wrong site or doing the wrong operation is extremely rare, even once is too often. Examples would be operating on the left knee rather than the right knee or removing the appendix instead of the gall bladder. Close to the time of your surgery, confirm with your doctor and your surgeon which operation is to be performed.

10. Before you leave hospital, ask your doctor or another health care professional to explain your future treatment plan

When people are discharged from hospital, doctors can sometimes think their patients understand more than they really do about their continuing treatment and follow-up.

You may wish to ask:

Who will be following up on my care and when do I need to see them?

How long will I be taking this medicine?

Will I require physiotherapy or other rehabilitation services?

When can I return to work?

When can I play sport? When can I drive?

Will I be given a written summary of my care to give to my doctor?

Remember to visit your doctor after you're discharged.

You can expect your health care professional to:

- Actively involve you in your own health care
- Set aside time to allow you to talk about your concerns
- Provide information for you in a language and format that is easy to understand
- Take a complete medication history which includes over-the-counter medicines, herbs, vitamins, alcohol and recreational drugs that you use
- Provide verbal and written information about medicines in plain language
- Make sure that you get the results of your tests and investigations
- Set out all your possible treatment options
- Provide you with complete information about your treatment if you are to have surgery or a procedure
- Make sure you know exactly what is going to happen to you in surgery and that you have consented in full
- Discuss discharge planning if you need to go to hospital. Start planning as early as practical – if possible, before the time of the hospital admission.

Where can you go for more information?

A good place to start finding information about your condition is the HealthInsite website www.healthinsite.gov.au. Your local library may help you with access to the Internet.

You may also like to contact a support group for people with similar health conditions.

The **FREE 10 Tips Booklet** is available at your health service or at the Australian Council for Safety & Quality in Health Care website <http://www.safetyandquality.org>.

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Become more actively involved in your health care

November 2004

10 tips for safer health care



You can work with your health care professionals to ensure the best possible care for yourself.



This pamphlet is available in English and in a number of other languages on the Queensland Health website, <http://www.health.qld.gov.au/quality/publications.asp>.

Safety in health care is important!

Australia has one of the best health care systems in the world. This means that when you visit a health care service you expect to receive the safest health care available.

But health care is becoming more complicated every day. Even a small oversight in one area can have a big flow-on effect in another area. Sometimes things don't work out as expected and harm results from our health care. The results can be relatively minor and easily fixed, or they can be more serious.

Most problems happen because of the way things are done, not because of any person. Problems in the system can increase the risk that something may go wrong for you. If problems do happen, they need to be noticed quickly and fixed before they cause harm. With your help, systems in health care can continue to be improved so that problems are less likely to occur.

If things do go wrong, it is important that health care professionals find out exactly what happened so that they can actively look for ways to stop it happening again. They should also let the patient and their carers know what happened and what will be done about it.

No single person or group can improve health care systems on their own. Improving safety in health care is not the business of only doctors, nurses or other health care professionals. Everyone has a part to play – especially **YOU**, the patient receiving care.

1. Be actively involved in your own health care

Taking part in decisions about your treatment is the single most important way to help prevent things from going wrong and to ensure the best possible care for yourself.

2. Speak up if you have any questions or concerns

Choose a health care professional with whom you feel you can talk about your health and your treatment options. Remember that you have the right to ask questions and to expect answers you understand. However, your health care professional can only answer your questions if you ask them. You have the right to ask for another professional opinion. A family member, carer or interpreter can be present if this will help you.

You may wish to ask:

*I'm not sure I understand what you said...
I'm worried that...
Could you please explain that to me again?
Can I come back with my family to talk about this again?*

3. Learn more about your condition or treatments by asking your doctor, nurse or other health care professional and by using other reliable sources of information

It's a good idea to collect as much reliable information as you can about your condition, tests and treatments.

You may wish to ask:

*Can you please tell me more about my condition?
How sure are you that I have this condition?
Do you have any information that I can take away with me?
Can you tell me where I can find out more?
Why do I need to have this particular test?
What are the different treatments for this condition?
How will this treatment help me? What are the risks of this treatment?
Is this treatment based on the latest scientific evidence?
What is likely to happen if I don't have this treatment?
What does the treatment involve? What should I look out for?
What can I do to help myself? When should I come back to see you?*

4. Keep a list of all the medicines you are taking

You can use this list to let your doctor and pharmacist know about everything you are taking, and about any drug allergies you may have. Remember to include prescriptions, over-the-counter medicines and complementary medicines such as vitamins and herbs on your list.

5. Make sure you understand the medicines that you are taking

When you get your medicine read the label, including any warnings. Make sure it is what your doctor ordered for you. Whether you are starting on a new medication or if you are asked to stop taking your medications before treatment or a procedure, be sure you understand what side effects may occur and if or when to restart.

You may wish to ask:

*What do the directions on the label mean?
Do you have any written information about this medicine?
How much should I take, and when should I take it?
What are the common side effects? What should I look out for?
How long before it starts to work?
Will this medicine interact with the other medicines that I'm taking?
Are there any foods or other things that I should avoid while I'm on this medicine?
How long do I need to take this medicine?
Do I restart taking the medication and when?*

6. Make sure you get the results of any test or investigation

If you don't get your results when expected, don't assume that everything is automatically alright. Call your doctor to find out your results, and ask what they mean for your care.

USE THE NEXT FOUR TIPS IF YOU ARE IN HOSPITAL, OR PLAN TO HAVE MEDICAL TREATMENT OR SURGERY IN HOSPITAL.

7. Talk to your doctor or other health care professionals about your options

Be involved in decisions about your hospital treatment by discussing your options with your health care professionals.

You may wish to ask:

*How quickly do I need to have this treatment?
Is there an option to have the surgery/procedure as a day patient?
Is there more than one hospital from which to choose for my care?
If so, which has the best care and results for treating my condition?*

8. Make sure that you understand what will happen

Ask your doctor exactly what the treatment will involve and who will be in charge of your care when you're in hospital. Your doctor or other health care professionals can help you find out what you need to know. Remember to tell the surgeon, anaesthetist and nurses if you have allergies or have ever had a bad reaction to an anaesthetic or any other drug.