



GUIDE

Take charge of your safety

Helpful tips for patients and their families



The Ottawa | L'Hôpital
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Disclaimer

This is general information developed by The Ottawa Hospital. It is not intended to replace the advice of a qualified health-care provider. Please consult your health-care provider who will be able to determine the appropriateness of the information for your specific situation.

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Our vision is to give each patient the world-class care, exceptional service and compassion we would want for our loved ones. A big part of this is keeping you safe while you're a patient at The Ottawa Hospital.

Your role as a patient or family member

As a patient, you are at the centre of the health-care team. You and your family members can help you stay safe in the hospital by working with your doctors, nurses and other staff members. It is important to understand the health care you receive.

- Be aware of safety risks in hospital
- Ask questions
- Ask for help
- Listen carefully
- Talk about any concerns you have

Be Aware—Safety risks in hospital

Hospitals are places of recovery and healing but there are also safety risks for patients, such as infections, falls and medication errors that can happen despite our best efforts.

Here are some tips to help you and your family stay safe.

1) **Avoid infections**

Infections are one of the most common safety hazards in the hospital.

How to reduce your risk:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water or hand sanitizer. Ask your visitors to do the same.
- Ask your nurse or doctor if they've cleaned their hands before examining you or giving you medicine. Really—it's okay to ask!
- Ask your family and friends not to visit you if they are sick. If people with a cough, sore throat, runny nose or nasal congestion must visit, they need wear a mask.
- If you sneeze or cough, cover your mouth and nose with your elbow or tissue.
- If you visit a patient in isolation, follow the directions from the nurse.



2) Avoid falls

Your illness, surgery or medicines can make you more likely to fall.

How to reduce your risk:

- If you are asked not to get up without help, please wait for assistance.



- Rubber-soled slippers are best. Avoid bathrobes or pants that drag on the floor.
- If you use a wheelchair, make sure the brakes are on before sitting down.
- If you use a walker or cane, use it at all times.
- Keep your call button, telephone and personal items within easy reach.
- Keep your room free of clutter.
- Let your health-care team know if you have fallen in the past, or think you may fall easily.



3) Learn about your medicines

You should always keep a list of the medicines you are taking, including why you are taking them and how to take them properly.

How to reduce your risk in the hospital:

- Tell your health-care team about all the medicines, drugs or alcohol (name, strength, and how often) you're taking and why. Make sure you include over-the-counter medicine, vitamins, herbal remedies, food supplements, patches, drops, or inhalers.
- When you are given medicine, ask what it is and what it's for.
- Before taking any medicine, ask your nurse to check your hospital bracelet to make sure the medicine is for you.
- If the medicine looks different from what you're used to taking, ask your nurse to verify that it is prescribed for you.
- When you're ready to go home, you'll get a list of current medicines to take at home. Review this list and ask questions if you don't understand what or why you're taking a certain medicine. Bring your medicine list with you to your next doctor's appointment and throw away any old list.



How to reduce your risk at home:

- When filling a prescription, make sure you can read the handwriting. If you can't read it, the pharmacist might not be able to either.
- When picking up the prescription, read the label and make sure you understand how much to take and when. If it's hard to read, ask for help.
- Try to use the same pharmacy so it can track all your prescriptions.
- Check the labels on medicine containers before taking them. Know how you're supposed to take the medicine, and what to do if you have side effects. Know if the medicine is safe to take with other medicines, vitamins, herbs or foods.
- If you don't understand something about your medicines, ask your doctor or pharmacist to explain.
- If you cannot fill your prescription, tell your doctor and why.



Ask questions

Learn about your medical condition, your treatment, appointments and any medicines you are taking. If there is anything you do not understand, feel comfortable to ask questions. Keep asking until you have all the information you need. A family member or caregiver, or an interpreter, can ask your questions for you if you cannot. If you think of a question at home, write it down and ask during your next visit.

Ask for help

- If it is dark, ask for lights to be turned on before moving around.
- If you need someone to watch you do your exercises, ask someone to come in.
- If you are on oxygen, ask for help when going to the washroom and walking.
- If you are unsure how to use equipment, ask someone to show you.
- Ask your health-care professionals who they are. All hospital employees—doctors, nurses and other staff—wear photo identification badges.
- Carefully read all medical forms before you sign them. Ask that anything you do not understand be explained to you before you sign.



Listen carefully

Listen carefully and ask for more information, especially if you do not understand. Take notes and bring a friend or family member with you for support. Ask for the doctor or nurse to provide written material. If you use a hearing aid, make sure it is cleaned and batteries are fresh so you can hear well.

Talk about any concerns or questions you have

Does something seem unsafe? Do you see something we've missed or something we can do better? Please let us know. We want to hear about it.

While in hospital, if you have questions or comments, please speak to the **manager of the area where you're receiving care**.

When you're at home, if you have questions or comments, please contact **Patient Advocacy at 613-798-5555, ext. 13377 or by email patientadvocacy@toh.on.ca**.

Please visit The Ottawa Hospital website for more health information: www.ottawahospital.on.ca.

***With your help
we can keep you safe!***