

# 10 Medication Safety Tips

## for Hospitalized Patients

- 1 Keep an up-to-date list and know your medicines.** Know the full names of your prescribed and over-the-counter medicines. Be sure you know your medicines' generic names if brand products are used. Because medicine names and doses are hard to remember, always keep an up-to-date list of all your medicines. This list should include all medicine doses, instructions, and why you take the medicine. Keep the list with you in your wallet, purse, or digitally on an app to share with your healthcare provider. Expect that your healthcare provider will review the list with you and/or a family member upon hospital admission.
- 2 Observe healthcare providers (and others) washing their hands.** Make sure anyone who brings you medicine (or who enters your room) first washes or sanitizes his or her hands. If you do not directly observe the handwashing, don't be afraid to speak up and ask the healthcare provider about handwashing.
- 3 State your name and date of birth and get your identification bracelet scanned.** The entire process of safely administering medicine to you begins by verifying your identity. Although your healthcare providers may know you well, it is important for you to provide anyone who brings you medicine with your full name and date of birth. If barcode scanning is available, be sure they also scan the barcode on your identification bracelet to confirm your identity before giving you any medicine. Don't let the process proceed until this has been done.
- 4 Where the technology is available, observe healthcare providers scanning barcodes on your medication packages before opening them.** Watch anyone who brings you oral medicine to ensure they scan the barcode on the outer package (just like grocery packages) before opening the medicine and giving it to you. Most oral medicine packages can be scanned in your room or at your bedside, after your identification bracelet has been scanned. Ask nurses to show you the actual package within which the medicine is available. Refuse to take unlabeled medicines (e.g., loose tablets, liquid poured into an unlabeled dosing cup, unlabeled syringe of medicine).
- 5 Know the reason for taking each medicine.** Ask your healthcare provider the reason for each medicine given to you and be sure it makes sense to you, given your health conditions. Possible mistakes can be detected if you speak up when the reason for taking the medicine does not make sense to you based on your health conditions.
- 6 Speak up about any differences in the appearance of your medicines.** If the medicines given to you in the hospital look different than what you usually take at home, speak up! If the color, shape, or number of tablets or capsules is different, or the volume of a liquid medicine is different, tell your healthcare provider. While the hospital may be using a different generic or brand of the medicine that looks different than your usual medicine, don't hesitate to ask to see the medicine in its outer wrapper. That way, you can verify the name and dose of the medicine if it looks different to you.
- 7 Ask about side effects.** When your healthcare provider prescribes a new medicine, ask him or her about any anticipated side effects that you may expect and should report. Depending on the side effect, you may also want to ask your healthcare provider for tips to lessen or avoid certain side effects.
- 8 Know your discharge medicines.** Ask your healthcare provider to review with you the medicines prescribed to you upon discharge, including over-the-counter medicines. If a new medicine has been prescribed at discharge, specifically ask if it replaces a previous home medicine that should be discontinued. If a previous home medicine has not been prescribed, specifically ask about it to learn if you should continue or stop taking it.
- 9 Let your healthcare provider know if the cost of the medicine is an issue.** If you find out after discharge that you cannot afford to pay for your prescribed medicine, don't be embarrassed. Talk to your healthcare provider. Do not simply avoid filling the prescription. Your doctor may be able to prescribe a different medicine or provide you with samples temporarily, or your pharmacist may be able to find manufacturers' coupons, to help cover the cost.
- 10 Talk with your pharmacist when picking up your discharge medicines.** When you pick up your prescription medicines at the pharmacy, open the bag, review the medicines, and ask to speak with the pharmacist. Although you may not have any specific questions for the pharmacist, ask him or her to review each of the prescribed medicines with you, including the dose, how to take each dose, and the reason for taking the medicine. Many reported medication errors have been prevented when this important step was taken.