



Safety Tips for Nova Scotians: Being Involved in Your Care

Our health care professionals are working hard to make sure you receive the best and safest health care possible.

You can help, too, by being an active, involved, and informed member of your health care team. People who are more involved with their care tend to do better and stay safer.



Ask questions and provide information.

Remember ... the doctors, nurses, pharmacists and others who provide you with care, want the best possible outcome for you.

Ask questions about your care if you have any doubts or concerns. Keep asking until you feel you have all the information you need. It may be helpful to have a relative or friend with you who knows your medical history and may help you understand the information you receive. Those involved in your care will welcome your questions.

If you think of a question at home, write it down and ask your health care professional during your next visit.

You might 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?

Find out more about your condition or treatments.

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

You might ask ...

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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? • Why do I need this test? What kind of information will it provide? • How will this treatment help me? What other treatments are there for this condition? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the risks of this treatment? test? • What is likely to happen if I don't have this treatment? • What does the treatment involve? Will I be uncomfortable? • What do I need to do to prepare for the test? • When should I come back to see you? |
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Medicines

Keep a list of all the medicines you are taking.

You can use the list to let your doctor, nurse, and pharmacist know about all the medicines you are taking, and about any drug allergies you may have. The list should include all medicines—those that are prescribed as well as those that are not prescribed such as over-the-counter medicines, herbal remedies, and vitamins.

You can bring all the medicines you are taking to your medical appointment.

Bring all medicine you no longer use to your pharmacy for safe disposal.

Make sure you can read your doctor's prescription.

If you can't read your doctor's handwriting, your pharmacist might not be able to either.

Double-check your medicines.

Read the label on your prescription when you pick it up from the pharmacy. If you don't recognize the medicine by the colour or size, verify that it is for you. Make sure it is what your doctor ordered for you.

Make sure you understand the medicines you are taking.

When you get your medicine, read the label, including the warnings. If the label is too difficult to read, let your pharmacist know.

Make sure that if you are seeing more than one doctor, each is aware of your visits to the other.

The doctor will then have the information needed to decide on your care. This will avoid repeat tests and procedures and increase the chance that your medicines will work together and prevent dangerous medicine interactions.

Try to deal with the same pharmacy so that it can keep track of all your prescriptions.

You might ask ...

- Do you have any written information about this medicine?
- What do the directions on the label mean?
- How much should I take, when should I take it, and for how long?
- Are there any common side effects?
- What should I look out for?
- How long before it starts to work?
- Is it harmful to take this medicine with another medicine?
- Are there any foods or other things that I should avoid while I'm on this medicine?
- Does this medicine replace any other ones that I am taking?

Care and Treatment

Find out who will be in charge of your care if you are thinking about going to the hospital, receiving care at home, or having a medical procedure.

Don't hesitate to tell the person providing your care if you think he or she has confused you with another patient.

Wear your hospital bracelet at all times when in hospital.

Help prevent the spread of germs.

Hand washing is the best way to prevent the spread of germs. You and your visitors should wash your hands frequently while in a health care environment. Those providing your care will welcome your reminder to wash their hands or wear gloves before examining you or giving you medication.

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

You should confirm with your doctor and your surgeon the operation to be performed as close as possible to it happening. For instance, if the procedure is a left knee replacement, then all are aware that it is the left knee.

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.

Don't be afraid to tell the nurse or the doctor if you think you are about to receive the wrong medicine.

When you are given medicine, ask the name of each medicine and the purpose of the medicine. If the medicine looks different from what you are used to taking, ask the person providing care for clarification.

You might ask ...

- How quickly do I need to have this treatment?
- Is there an option to have the surgery/procedure done as a day patient?
- How will having this surgery/procedure help me?
- 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?

Make sure when you are discharged from hospital you have all the information you need.

Before you leave hospital, ask your doctor or other health care professionals to explain the treatment plan you will use at home and what you can expect. Make sure you understand what is normal and what is not normal; for instance, the amount of bleeding or drainage that is to be expected.

Make sure you are clear about what you need to do at home including the medicines you need to take and information about a follow-up visit. Make sure you have a phone number in case you have any questions or run into difficulties.



You might ask ...

- Who will be following up on my care and when do I need to see them?
- What types of symptoms should I expect?
- How long will I be taking this medicine?
- Will I require physiotherapy or other rehabilitation services?
- Do I continue to take the medicines I was taking before I came to hospital?
- 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 pass on to my family doctor?
- Do you have a phone number I can call should I have any questions?

Sources

This fact sheet was adapted, in part, from information authored or provided by

- Australian Council for Safety and Quality in Health Care, *10 Tips for Safer Health Care* (www.safetyandquality.org)
- the US Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (www.ahrq.gov/consumer/)
- Johns Hopkins Medicine (www.hopkinsmedicine.org/patients/safety/)
- the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (www.jcaho.org)
- the College of Registered Nurses of Nova Scotia
- the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Nova Scotia
- Nova Scotia Health Care Safety Working Group