AUSTRALIAN COMMISSION
ON SAFETY AND QUALITY IN HEALTH CARE

Top Tips for Safe Health Care



What you need to know for yourself, your family or someone you care for.

www.safetyandquality.gov.au

About this booklet

This booklet is designed to help consumers, their families, carers and other support people get the most out of their health care.

Being actively involved, and working in partnership with healthcare providers, can help ensure you get the care that is right for you.

You can use the information in this booklet when you talk to your doctor and healthcare providers, including nurses, pharmacists, specialists, allied health and mental health workers.

This booklet has been produced by the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care, an Australian government agency that leads and coordinates national improvements in the safety and quality of health care.

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Enquiries regarding the use of this publication are welcome and can be sent to communications@safetyandquality.gov.au



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How to get further information

Consumer organisations

The following consumer organisations can provide advice about finding support networks and healthcare services:

Consumers Health Forum of Australia
Web: www.chf.org.au
Phone: 02 6273 5444

Health Care Consumers' Association of the ACT
Web: www.hcca.org.au
Phone: 02 6230 7800

Health Consumers NSW
Web: www.hcnsw.org.au
Phone: 02 9986 1082

Health Consumers QLD
Web: www.hcq.org.au
Phone: 07 3012 9090

Health Consumers Alliance of SA
Web: www.hcasa.asn.au
Phone: 08 8231 4169

Health Issues Centre VIC
Web: www.hic.org.au
Phone: 03 9664 9343

Health Consumers' Council WA
Web: www.hconc.org.au
Phone: 1800 620 780

Government websites with health information

Better Health Channel
Web: www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Healthdirect
24 Hour Health Advice
Web: www.healthdirect.gov.au
Phone: 1800 022 222

Pregnancy, birth and baby support and information
Web: www.pregnancybirthbaby.org.au
Phone: 1800 882 436

Head to Health
Web: www.headtohealth.gov.au

My Aged Care
Web: www.myagedcare.gov.au
Phone: 1800 200 422

Poisons Information Centre
Web: www.poisonsinfo.nsw.gov.au
Phone: 13 11 26

Emergency assistance
Web: www.triplezero.gov.au
Phone: 000

1 Ask questions

You have a right to ask questions about your health and health care. Don't feel shy about asking questions if you are unsure about the information you are given.

In fact, asking questions will help your doctor and other healthcare providers understand what worries you about your health and what is important to you when deciding your treatment.

If you are not confident to ask questions, bring a family member, friend or representative to help you. You can also ask for an interpreter from the Translating and Interpreting Service, which is a national service provided by the Australian Government (Phone: 131 450).

Writing your questions down before your appointment can help you feel prepared to get the answers you need. A Question Builder tool is available to help you prepare questions to bring to your appointment. This tool can be found here: **www.safetyandquality.gov.au/questionbuilder**.

Questions you can ask:

- **Can you please explain that to me again?**
- **Do I need tests or treatment and what are my treatment options?**
- **What can I do to help myself?**
- **Where can I get more information and support?**
- **Do I need to make another appointment and should I bring someone with me?**

2 Find good-quality and reliable health information

Good-quality and reliable health information can help you make informed decisions about your health care.

The best way to get health information is to ask your doctor or other healthcare provider.

If you seek advice from a complementary therapist (e.g. a naturopath, osteopath or traditional Chinese medicine practitioner), it is very important to let your regular healthcare provider know about any treatments or advice you receive from the complementary therapist. This can help to reduce the risk of something going wrong.

The information you find online is not always reliable. However, government-endorsed health websites such as Healthdirect Australia, the Better Health Channel, industry bodies such as the Australian Medical Association, and organisations like beyondblue and Cancer Council Australia have reliable information.



3 Understand the risks and benefits of medical tests, treatments and procedures

Before making a decision about your health care, it is important that you fully understand the risks and benefits of any medical test, treatment and procedure recommended by your doctor.

Asking your doctor or other healthcare provider questions about your testing and treatment options will help you make better decisions together.

Make sure you get the results of your test. Do not assume no news is good news.

Choosing Wisely Australia provides a useful resource for people wishing to find out more information about their treatment options. Their website lists recommendations for specific tests, treatments and procedures that may be unnecessary and sometimes harmful for consumers. The Choosing Wisely website can be found here: www.choosingwisely.org.au.

Questions you can ask:

- **Do I need any tests or treatment?**
- **How might this test affect or change my care?**
- **What are the potential risks of the test/treatment?**
- **Are there any other options available?**
- **What could happen if we wait and watch?**
- **What do I and/or my family need to know about this treatment/procedure (possible complications, time in hospital, time off work)?**
- **How do I find out if there are any costs?**
- **How can I get a second opinion?**

4 Keep a list of all the medicines you are taking

You can use the list to let your doctor and pharmacist know the medicines you are taking. Include vitamins and any other supplements on your list.

It is important you understand how to take your medication, especially if you use more than one medicine. If you have any questions about the directions on your medicine labels you can always ask your pharmacist. If you take multiple medications, and need help with knowing how and when to take these medicines, you can ask your doctor for a referral for a Home Medicines Review. This will involve a pharmacist visiting you at home and talking to you about the medicines you are taking.

A lot of helpful information about medicines is provided by NPS MedicineWise. The NPS MedicineWise website can be found here: **www.nps.org.au/consumers**.

5 Confirm what will happen before your operation or other procedure

Ask which doctor or other healthcare provider will be in charge of your procedure and check with them what operation they plan to perform.

If at any time you don't understand what is being said to you, ask for the information to be repeated or explained in another way. You should be asked several questions to confirm the procedure you are having and the site of the procedure should be marked on your body with a pen.

Tell the doctor or other healthcare provider about any allergies and reactions to medicines you know of and ask them to note this in your medical record.

6 Ask about your care when you leave hospital

Ask to have your family, carer and/or representative involved in discussions about your discharge from hospital.

Ask for a written discharge plan or care plan that summarises why you came into hospital, the care you received, the plan of action when you leave the hospital and lists any follow-up appointments.



? Questions you can ask:

- **Can you explain to me what I need to do to manage my care at home?**
- **Will I need someone to care for me after the operation?**
- **How can I find someone to assist me?**
- **What should I do if my symptoms get worse?**
- **Who can I contact if I need to speak with someone?**
- **Will I be given a written discharge plan or care plan?**
- **Will you send the discharge plan or care plan to my GP?**

7 Know your rights

Everyone who is seeking or receiving care in the Australian health system has certain rights regarding their care.

You have a right to:

- access health care
- receive safe and high-quality care
- be shown respect
- be informed about services, treatment, options and costs in a clear and open way
- be included in decisions and choices about your care
- privacy and confidentiality regarding the information you provide
- comment on care and have your concerns addressed.

You can read more about your rights in the Australian Charter of Healthcare Rights, which was developed by the Commission, by visiting: **www.safetyandquality.gov.au/australian-charter-healthcare-rights**.



8 Understand privacy and accessing your medical record

Your doctor and other healthcare providers keep a record of your health and medical history.

They are required by law (the *Privacy Act 1988*) to keep your medical record confidential and private. Occasionally, relevant parts of your medical record will need to be shared between healthcare providers as part of your care.

If you would like access to your medical record, you can ask to see it. If you have registered for the electronic My Health Record, you can access this yourself on the internet. If you notice something missing from your medical record or your My Health Record, ask your healthcare provider to have it corrected.

To register for an electronic health record visit: **www.myhealthrecord.gov.au** and for guidance on how to access and correct your medical record visit: **www.oaic.gov.au/privacy/health-information/**



9 Your feedback helps improve healthcare safety and quality

Healthcare providers value your feedback. It helps the organisation understand what they are doing well, and what might need improvement.

You can share your feedback with staff in person, write your feedback down or complete a feedback form.

If you have a complaint about your care, try to resolve it directly with the hospital or healthcare provider. Many hospitals have a patient advocate or liaison officer whom you can talk to about your concerns.

If the healthcare provider does not respond, or you are not happy with the response you receive, you may wish to contact your state's health complaints authority. These are listed below:

ACT Human Rights Commission
Web: www.hrc.act.gov.au/complaints
Phone: 02 6205 2222

NSW Health Care Complaints Commission
Web: www.hccc.nsw.gov.au
Phone: 1800 043 159

NT Health and Community Services Complaints Commission
Web: www.hcscc.nt.gov.au
Phone: 1800 004 474

QLD Office of the Health Ombudsman
Web: www.oho.qld.gov.au
Phone: 133 646

SA Health and Community Services Complaints Commissioner
Web: www.hcscc.sa.gov.au
Phone: 1800 232 007

TAS Health Complaints Commissioner
Web: www.healthcomplaints.tas.gov.au
Phone: 1800 001 170

VIC Health Complaints Commissioner
Web: www.hcc.vic.gov.au
Phone: 1300 582 113

WA Health and Disability Services Complaints Office
Web: www.hadsco.wa.gov.au
Phone: 1800 813 583

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