



Help prevent errors in your care

For surgical patients

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This brochure includes tips that can help you prepare for surgery and make sure that you have the correct procedure performed at the correct place, or site, on your body. To support this goal, the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations has created a Universal Protocol to Prevent Wrong Site, Wrong Procedure and Wrong Person Surgery™. The Universal Protocol has been endorsed by more than 50 professional medical associations and organizations.



Joint Commission
on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations
Setting the Standard for Quality in Health Care

The Universal Protocol is endorsed by:
Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education
Agency for Healthcare Research & Quality
American Academy of Ambulatory Care Nursing
American Academy of Cosmetic Surgery
American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery
American Academy of Family Physicians
American Academy of Ophthalmology
American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons
American Academy of Otolaryngology-Head & Neck Surgery
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Association of Ambulatory Surgery Centers
American Association of Eye & Ear Hospitals
American Association of Neurological Surgeons
American Association of Nurse Anesthetists
American Association of Oral & Maxillofacial Surgeons
American College of Cardiology
American College of Chest Physicians
American College of Emergency Physicians
American College of Foot and Ankle Surgeons
American College of Obstetricians & Gynecologists
American College of Physicians
American College of Radiology
American College of Surgeons
American Dental Association
American Hospital Association
American Medical Association
American Medical Group Association
American Nurses Association
American Organization of Nurse Executives
American Pediatric Surgical Association
American Radiological Nurses Association
American Society for Surgery of the Hand
American Society of Anesthesiologists
American Society of General Surgeons
American Society of Ophthalmic Registered Nurses
American Society of PeriAnesthesia Nurses
American Society of Plastic Surgeons
American Society of Plastic Surgical Nurses
American Urological Association
Association of American Medical Colleges
Association of periOperative Registered Nurses
Association of Surgical Technologists
Congress of Neurological Surgeons
Federated Ambulatory Surgery Association
Federation of American Hospitals
Medical Group Management Association
National Association Medical Staff Services
National Patient Safety Foundation
North American Spine Society
Radiological Society of North America
The Society of Thoracic Surgeons

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Health care workers across the country are working hard to make health care safety a priority. Everyone has a role in making health care safe—physicians, health care executives, nurses, technologists, and you, the patient. You can play a vital role in making your surgical procedure safe by becoming an active, involved and informed member of your health care team. Here's what you can do to help make your surgery safe.

Before you arrive . . .

- Make sure that your surgeon is using the Universal Protocol. All Joint Commission-accredited organizations are required to follow the Universal Protocol to Prevent Wrong Site, Wrong Procedure and Wrong Person Surgery™. Joint Commission accredited organizations are listed on Quality Check at www.qualitycheck.org.
- Check with your doctor to see whether there are any prescription or non-prescription medications that you should avoid taking or stop taking temporarily before your surgery.
- Check with your doctor about what you can or can't eat or drink before your surgery.
- Write down your questions or concerns instead of trying to remember them.
- Make arrangements for transportation to and from the hospital or medical facility with a responsible family member or friend.
- Ask a family member or friend to be with you in the hospital or medical facility. This person can serve as your advocate and help to ensure your comfort and safety.
- Before leaving your home, shower and wash your hair, and remove any nail polish (fingers and toes). Also, do not wear make-up. The skin and nails provide important signs of blood circulation.
- It is a good idea to leave any valuables, such as jewelry, at home.

At the hospital or medical facility . . .

- You will be asked to sign an informed consent form, which verifies that you and your doctor have discussed the surgery that is to be performed on your body, the expectation that you have of each other, and the risks associated with the surgery.

- The staff responsible for your care will verify who you are, what kind of surgery you are having, and the expected part of your body on which surgery is to be performed. You will be asked these questions many times. Staff will also double-check what you tell them against the documents provided by your doctor's office, including X-rays. You may find this irritating, but it is being done for your safety.
- Before going to the pre-operative area, you must remove any hairpins, jewelry, dentures, contact lenses, and glasses. The staff will take care of these items and return them to you after the procedure.
- Depending on the type of surgery you are having, the doctor who will perform your surgery (or another member of your health care team) will mark the correct location on your body on which your procedure is to be performed. Called site marking, this is a critical step in ensuring your safety and preventing errors, especially if you are having surgery on one of your arms, legs, hands, fingers, eyes, ears, etc. For example, if you are having a cataract removed only from your right eye, the surgeon will make a mark somewhere around your right eye. He or she may also attach a sticker to the right side of your head. This is a way to assure that the correct eye will be operated on.
- If at all possible, the mark will be made before you are sedated. However, in some instances you will need to be sedated before the mark can be made. If this happens, a family member or friend may be asked to oversee the marking of the correct surgical site. If a family member or friend is not available, another member of the health care team will make sure that the correct site is marked.
- Make sure that **only** the location where your procedure is to be performed is marked. It can be confusing if other sites are marked.

- If you are having spine surgery, the mark will be made on the area of your spine on which your procedure is to be performed. However, this is just a "marker" to indicate that you are having spine surgery and to identify the general level of the surgery (neck, upper back, lower back). The exact location will be confirmed by taking and reviewing special X-rays in the operating room after you are asleep.
- Ask your doctor if he or she plans to take a "time out" with the surgical team just before beginning your surgery. During the time out, the members of the health care team assure themselves that they are performing the correct procedure at the correct site and on the correct person.

In the recovery room . . .

- After your surgery, your doctor or nurse will ask about any pain you may have. Joint Commission accredited organizations are required to evaluate your pain and provide appropriate relief through medication and other methods. Whenever you are asked to take a medication, especially a new one, ask what it is for and its side effects. This will ensure that you are receiving the correct medication. If you have questions or concerns about any medication, you should raise these with your doctor or nurse.
- If you are given IV (intravenous) fluids, ask your nurse how long it should take for the liquid to "run out." And tell your nurse if it does not seem to be dripping properly (too fast or too slow).

Remember to follow-up with your doctor about any therapy or medicines that you may need in your recovery and when you can resume certain activities, like work, exercise or travel.