



## Pediatric Patient Safety: A Guide for Parents

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## Introduction

As a parent, you want to keep your child safe and protected - especially when he or she is sick and/or hospitalized. The best way to keep your child safe is to become well informed about hospital stays, medication usage and safety issues in health care.

The doctors and nurses caring for your child also want the best for him or her. They need your help in assuring that accidental injuries and errors don't occur. This booklet will help you take a proactive role in your child's care.



The most important thing to remember is: if you don't understand something, ask! Do not be afraid that you will upset the doctor or nurse. It is part of their responsibilities to be sure that they explain everything to patients and their families.

Bring a notebook and pen with you when you talk to your child's doctor or nurse. Write everything down that he or she tells you. You will not remember everything later and that can be the cause of misunderstandings and possibly errors.

There are many things you as a parent can do to help keep your child as safe as possible during his or her hospitalization. We will go over each point in the following pages.

Tell the nurse immediately if your child starts complaining of burning, itching or pain or if you notice that he or she is having shortness of breath, dizziness or confusion after receiving a medication or IV. It could be an allergic reaction to the drug.

Medication safety does not end when you leave the hospital!

When you receive a prescription for your child, be sure you can read it. If you can't, ask for it to be typed or printed. If you can't read it, your pharmacist may not be able to either. Be sure that you know the proper dosage and how and when your child is to take the medication. Some medications should not be taken with food; others should be taken with food. If the instructions state to take the medication 3 times a day, ask if it must be taken every 8 hours around the clock or 3 times a day during waking hours. Also, ask about possible side effects the medication may have.

When you have the prescription filled at the pharmacy, compare the label to what the doctor has told you. If you have any questions, ask your pharmacist. And be certain that your pharmacy has a record of your child's allergies and all of the drugs they are taking. Certain drugs should not be taken in combination with others.



Do not cut or crush tablets unless the directions state to do so. Crushing can change how the drug works and cutting a tablet doesn't always give an accurate dose.

Be sure you store your medications away from other products, especially if the containers look similar. You can also ask your pharmacist for special measuring devices for liquid medications that are easy to read and provide the proper amount of medication.

**Summary**

You can help make your child's hospital experience a safer one by following the simple suggestions outlined in this brochure.

To summarize:

- Learn about your child's condition and treatment options.
- If necessary, don't hesitate to ask a family member or friend to assist you.
- Speak up if you have questions or concerns.
- Tell your health care team everything your child is taking, including over the counter drugs, herbs and other "natural" remedies.
- Make sure that your child's health care team knows about any allergies your child has or any adverse reactions he or she has had to medicines or anesthesia.
- If your child needs surgery, make sure you know what to expect.
- When discharged from the hospital, ask the doctor to explain the treatment plan your child is to follow at home.
- Be sure that instructions regarding all medications prescribed by the doctor are given to you in terms that you understand.
- Be an active member of your child's health care team!

*References:*

*Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)*  
*Joint Commission for Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO)*  
*National Patient Safety Foundation (NPAF)*  
*Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ)*  
*Institute for Safe Medication Practices (ISMP)*