

10 Ways to Reduce Preventable Complications During a Hospital Stay

1. If You Need Something, Say Something



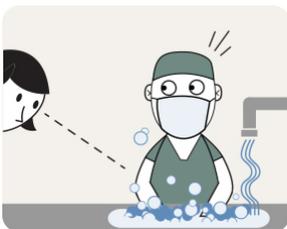
While hospitals are not hotels, the doctors and nurses charged with your care are there to provide a service. Of course there are times when you are too vulnerable and unable to advocate for yourself; that's when it helps to have someone at your bedside holding people around you accountable. Still, hospitals are busy places and sometimes doctors and nurses get sidetracked. So don't be skittish about getting what you need, especially if it relates to safety or pain.

2. Be Self-Centered



If someone comes into your room to give you medication by mouth or inserted into your intravenous (IV) fluid or to bring you down for a test, make sure they check your patient identification bracelet first. If someone gives you instructions that you don't quite understand, ask them to repeat it in a more understandable way. And don't be shy about asking why something is being done. Why are you elevating my head? What does that suctioning do?

3. Zoom in on Hands



You can't know if a person's hands are contaminated just by looking at them, so you will have to make sure if you want to be protected against hospital-acquired infections. Anyone who touches you, or anything attached to you, such as tubing or catheters, must be clean. To be touch-worthy, hands must be covered in gloves that haven't touched anything else, cleaned with soap and water, or sanitized with alcohol-based liquid (usually in a dispenser on the wall).

If you aren't sure if a person's hands are clean, ask. When did you last wash your hands? Don't worry that you might offend anyone. There is probably a sign on the wall or a button on their uniform that reminds you to ask. And while you are micromanaging hygiene make sure your own hands steer clear too. Watch out for the TV remote and doorknobs.

4. Mind the Medicines



Let everyone involved in your care know all the medications you normally take including all vitamins, minerals, herbs, and other dietary supplements. If you are allergic to any medication, let them know what happens to you when you take it. Ask about each oral or intravenous medication you are given—what is it and why am I receiving it. Confirm it's for you. Don't assume everyone knows everything.

5. Report Wound Woes



This is especially important if you have just had surgery. Let your doctor or nurse know that the integrity of a wound dressing has been compromised—if it got wet or is coming off, or if it looks dirty or strange in anyway.

6. Voice Grievances



Most people are not unkind or intentionally negligent, but sometimes you can come across an insensitive or inattentive person during the course of your hospital stay. If you experience something that is problematic that you believe needs addressing make sure you report it to hospital administrators. Many hospitals have patient advocates on staff who can direct your complaint to the right authority.

7. Bring a Backup



Sometimes it isn't possible for you to monitor your own care, which is why you need a person to watch over you and advocate for you as much as possible. In addition, someone who knows you well will notice if something about your behavior is amiss, particularly if you become delirious or your mental state changes.