

# 7 Practical Tips to Help You Avoid Being the Victim of Medical Malpractice

In an ideal world, every professional to whom we trusted our safety or wellbeing would be brilliant and infallible. They'd never have a bad day, make a careless error, or put us at risk in any way. But in reality, even the most qualified and experienced medical professionals make mistakes. And unfortunately, some of these slip-ups can put lives in danger.

In fact, one study (link below) showed that each year, between 210,000 and 440,000 patient deaths occur due to preventable hospital or doctor errors. This fact is not meant to alarm you or convince you to lose faith in doctors, but to help you understand that it's important to do everything in your power to make sure that these dangerous mistakes don't happen to you.

## 1. Check Background

The first step to ensuring that you get the best possible medical care is to do your homework on the hospitals and doctors you choose, particularly if surgery is involved. You can start online, but keep in mind that there isn't one master database out there that lets you see everything about a given doctor's background.

Visit your state's medical board website to find information like medical license status, education, certifications, legal and disciplinary actions. Next, head to the Federation of State Medical Boards' Doc Info site, where you can pay \$10 for the full profile of a doctor practicing in any state. Keep in mind that it's not uncommon for doctors to be sued, so finding

a record of legal action taken against your doctor isn't necessarily a red flag since many are thrown out or won by the doctor. If you see several records of legal action, however, you should do some more digging online to find news stories that can provide more information.

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It's also important to research the hospital where you'll be treated, as many grave mistakes are not the fault of one physician but a facility's flawed system that doesn't have enough checks in place to prevent wrongdoing.

## **2. Tell Everyone Who You Are**

You may feel silly doing so, but you should get in the habit of repeating your full name, birthdate and the procedure you're having done to each and every technician, nurse and doctor with whom you interact. Many errors are caused by a simple mix-up related to these critical details.

## **3. Confirm Your Identity**

According to the American Hospital Association, your hospital staff should always use at least 2 different ways to confirm your identity. So in addition to asking you to state your name and date of birth, request that they check your bracelet to be sure that you are the person who is supposed to be where you are before any action is taken. If there is a barcode on your bracelet, this should also be scanned electronically. On that note, the first thing to do when your bracelet is put on is to confirm that all information on it is correct.

## 4. Request Chart Checks

A nurse, doctor, or technician confirming your procedure is not enough – just because they state the right procedure doesn't mean that correct information is reflected in your chart. So, be sure to also ask that they confirm the procedure details in your chart every step of the way.

## 5. Ask the Surgeon for Marking



Prior to a surgical procedure, it's common for patients to be asked to mark the surgical site on their own bodies. But this doesn't guarantee that the surgeon will know about that marking unless he or she is in the room with you when it occurs. So, don't make any markings without your surgeon

present.

All of this may sound like overkill or paranoid behavior, but the fact is that many major medical errors can be traced back to mistakes made during these processes. In 1995, for example, Willie King of Tampa woke from surgery to discover that the wrong leg had been amputated. What led to this horrific mistake was the fact that several documents cited the incorrect leg, which was also the one prepped for surgery. This may have been prevented had he been more involved in pre-operation procedures.

## 6. Forget Politeness

One of the most important ways to reduce the likelihood of mistakes being made in your treatment is for you to stop worrying about being polite. If a hospital staff member gets

your name almost right when they ask you to confirm your identity, correct them. If your name is Anna Smith and the nurse says, "Annie Smith," it could be because there is another patient being treated named Annie Smith, and if you don't speak up, you might end up undergoing the wrong procedure.

If there's ever even the smallest indication that something is wrong, stop everything and refuse to go further until it's sorted out. At worst, you might feel a little embarrassed for making a fuss, and at best, you avoid being the victim of a mix-up that could mean serious injury or your life.

## 7. Bring Support

Finally, it's always a good idea to have a friend or family member with you to be another set of eyes and ears making sure that everything is as it should be. There are times when you may be unconscious, in pain, or disoriented and having an advocate there could mean all the difference.

We, as patients, cannot control everything that happens to us when we're in a doctor's or hospital's care. But the good news is that we're not powerless in the process either. By being vigilant and attentive to everything that goes on, you can help prevent becoming the victim of medical malpractice.

### **Recommended Reading:**

- *Gluten, Candida, Leaky Gut Syndrome, and Autoimmune Diseases*
- *Besieged by Guilt: Ex-Pharmaceutical Employees Speak Out*
- *...*
- *Detox Cheap and Easy Without Fasting – Recipes Included*
- *Make Your Immune System Bulletproof with These Natural Remedies*
- *12 Things We'd Say about Health If It Weren't for Lawsuits*

- *Doctors Against Vaccines – Hear From Those Who Have Done the Research*

**Sources:**

- *A New, Evidence-based Estimate of Patient Harms Associated with Hospital Care – Journal of Patient Safety*
- *Links to State Medical Boards – AMA*
- *Physician Data Center – Federation of State Medical Boards*