

How to Avoid Safety Risks During Your Hospital Stay

Notes:

This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

Find this pamphlet and all our patient resources here:
<https://library.nshealth.ca/Patients-Guides>

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time:
Call 811 or visit: <https://811.novascotia.ca>

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While in the hospital, if you have questions or comments, please talk to your health care provider or the **manager of the department where you are being cared for.**

Patient/Family Feedback

When you are at home, if you have questions or comments, please call the **Healthcare Experience team:**

- › Phone (toll-free): **1-844-884-4177** for any of our locations

Annapolis Valley, South West, and South Shore areas

- › Email: WZpatientrelations@nshealth.ca

Colchester, Cumberland, Pictou County, and East Hants areas

- › Email: NZpatientrelations@nshealth.ca

Cape Breton, Antigonish, and Guysborough areas

- › Email: EZpatientrelations@nshealth.ca

Halifax Regional Municipality, Eastern Shore, and West Hants areas

- › Email: CZpatientrelations@nshealth.ca

Avoiding medication mistakes

- When you are in our care, we put an ID bracelet on your wrist. This bracelet has your name and other information on it, which helps us identify you. Checking your ID bracelet helps to make sure that things like medication(s), tests, and meal trays are given to the right patient.

How to lower your risk:

- If your ID bracelet gets damaged, falls off, or gets lost, please tell someone on your health care team so that they can get you a new one.

If any of the information on your ID bracelet is wrong, tell your health care team right away.

- Remind us to check your ID bracelet before we give you any medication(s), test, or meals, and before any procedures (like diagnostic imaging [X-rays], surgery, blood work).

Talk about any questions or concerns you have.

Does something seem dangerous? Do you see something we may have missed or something we can do better? Please let us know. We want to hear from you.

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Our commitment to patient safety

At Nova Scotia Health, we believe that safety is everyone's job. We are committed to providing you with a safe and quality experience while you are here with us.

Your role as a patient or a family member and/or support person(s)

You and your family members and/or support person(s) can help you stay safe in the hospital by working with your health care team. It is important to understand the health care you receive by:

- Being aware of the safety risks in the hospital
- Asking questions
- Asking for help
- Listening carefully
- Talking about any concerns you have

Patient safety risks in the hospital

Despite our best efforts to keep you safe, there are risks to being in a hospital. For example, a patient may fall, get an infection or a pressure injury (bedsore), or be given the wrong dose of medication. Understanding these risks, and what you can do to prevent them, can help keep you safe.

Here are some tips to help keep you and your family safe:

Avoiding infections

- Infections are one of the most common safety risks of being in the hospital.
- At Nova Scotia Health, we have an active Infection Prevention and Control team that monitors and tracks infections and illnesses that may spread between patients and staff. We also have an Environmental Services team that cleans all areas of the hospital following Infection Prevention and Control guidelines.

Preventing pressure injuries

- A pressure injury is an injury to the skin and tissue under the skin. Skin over bony areas are at higher risk (like on the heels, elbows, hips, or bum). The skin gets red at first and may turn into an open sore.

How to lower your risk:

- Tell us if you have any **reddened or open areas** on your skin.
- Get out of bed, turn, and change positions often to make sure you get good blood flow. If you need help, let us know.
- Eat as healthy as you can, making sure to eat high in protein as it helps with recovery.
- Use pillows to help protect bony areas from pressure.
- Drink **8 cups** of fluid every day. Talk to your dietitian about specific restrictions.
- If you have a bowel (poop) or bladder (pee) accident, **tell your nurse right away** so moisture does not stay on your skin. **This prevents pressure injuries.**

How to lower your risk at home:

- When filling a prescription, if there is any handwriting on it **make sure that you can read it**. If not, the pharmacist also may not be able to and the pharmacist should check with the person who prescribed it.
- Read the labels of any prescriptions that you pick up and make sure you understand **how much to take, when to take it, and what the side effects might be**. If you are not sure, ask for help.
- Keep all of your prescriptions at a single pharmacy if possible so that they can track all your prescriptions and make sure everything is updated.
- If a prescription cannot be filled, call your primary health care provider (family doctor or nurse practitioner) to let them know.

How to lower your risk:

Handwashing

- Wash your hands often using soap and water or alcohol-based rub (alcohol hand sanitizer), especially before and after meals, or using the bathroom. This is the best way to prevent the spread of infections.
- Remind your friends, family and/or support person(s), and visitors, to wash their hands, too.
- It is OK to ask staff members if they have washed their hands before caring for you.

Managing the spread of infections

- If you sneeze or cough, cover your mouth and nose with your elbow or a tissue.
- Tell visitors and/or your support person(s) not to visit you if they are sick.
- Follow all rules for visiting a patient in isolation.
- Wear a mask as asked by our team.

Avoiding falls

- You may be at a higher risk of falling while in the hospital because of your illness, the medications you are taking, or because of surgery.
- Falls are a common cause of hip fractures in older adults.

How to lower your risk:

- If we ask you not to get up without help, please wait for staff to help you.
- Make sure your call bell and personal items are within arm's reach.**
- Using the washroom:** Please let us know if you need help.
- Wear shoes and clothes that fit and will not cause you to trip. Rubber soled slippers are best.
- Avoid long pants and bathrobes.
- If you use a walker or cane at home, please bring it to the hospital. If the health care team has asked you to use a walking aid while you are with us, please keep using it. We encourage you to ask your health care team any questions you may have about how to use your walking aids properly.

- Keep the bed at knee height. If the health care team have asked you to use bedrails, please call for help before getting out of bed.

- Tell us if you have fallen before** (at home or in the hospital) or think you may fall easily.

Understanding your medication(s)

- Knowing what medication(s) you are taking and why you need them can help keep you safe not only while you are in the hospital, but also when you go home.

How to lower your risk in the hospital:

- Make sure that the health care team checks your ID bracelet before giving you any medication(s).
- Talk to your health care team if you have any questions about the medication(s) you are taking, if it looks different, if it is new, or if you think it is not the right time to take it.
- If you want to bring in any medication(s) (including over-the-counter) from home, make sure you ask your care team if it is OK.
- Knowing **what medication(s) you are taking, why you are taking them, and for how long**, is important. If you have any questions, ask your health care team.