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 (JCAHO) has created a Universal Protocol (or standard policy) to Prevent Wrong Site, Wrong Procedure and Wrong Person Surgery.

The Standard Policy has been endorsed by more than 40 professional medical associations and organizations. It outlines steps that you and the healthcare team take before surgery.
Before you arrive...
- Make sure that your surgeon is using the Universal Protocol. Beginning in July 2004, all JCAHO accredited organizations will be required to follow the Universal Protocol to Prevent Wrong Site, Wrong Procedure and Wrong Person Surgery. JCAHO accredited organizations are listed on Quality Check at www.jcaho.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 that 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, you or a family member 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, a member of the health care team 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 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.

In the recovery room...
- After your surgery, your doctor or nurse will ask about any pain you may have. JCAHO 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, let your nurse know if the IV fluid bag becomes empty.
- Patient Controlled Analgesia (PCA) pumps are a way of controlling pain. With these, patients give themselves small doses of pain medication according to how much pain they are feeling. If your physician has chosen to use a PCA pump to manage your pain, it is important that you, and only you, are responsible for operating the controls that give the doses of pain medication. Friends and relatives, no matter how good their intentions are, do not know how much pain you have and could give you the wrong dose.

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.