



**Help  
prevent  
errors in  
your care  
For surgical patients**

**A Speak Up™ safety initiative**

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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.



**The Universal Protocol is endorsed by:**

Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education  
Agency for Healthcare Research & Quality  
American Academy of Ambulatory Care Nursing  
American Academy of Cosmetic Surgery  
American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstruction Surgery  
American Academy of Family Physicians  
American Academy of Ophthalmology  
American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons  
American Academy of Otolaryngology Head & Neck Surgery  
American Academy of Pediatrics  
American Association of Ambulatory Surgery Centers  
American Association of Eye & Ear Hospitals  
American Association of Nurse Anesthetists  
American Association of Oral & Maxillofacial Surgeons  
American College of Cardiology  
American College of Chest Physicians  
American College of Emergency Physicians  
American College of Foot and Ankle Surgeons  
American College of Obstetricians & Gynecologists  
American College of Physicians  
American College of Surgeons  
American Dental Association  
American Hospital Association  
American Medical Association  
American Medical Group Association  
American Nurses Association  
American Organization of Nurse Executives  
American Pediatric Surgical Association  
American Society for Surgery of the Hand  
American Society of Anesthesiologists  
American Society of General Surgeons  
American Society of Ophthalmic Registered Nurses  
American Society of PeriAnesthesia Nurses  
American Society of Plastic Surgeons  
American Society of Plastic Surgical Nurses  
American Urological Association  
Association of American Medical Colleges  
Association of periOperative Registered Nurses  
Association of Surgical Technologists  
Federated Ambulatory Surgery Association  
Federation of American Hospitals  
Medical Group Management Association  
National Association Medical Staff Services  
National Patient Safety Foundation  
North American Spine Society  
Radiological Society of North America  
The society of Thoracic Surgeons

## Help prevent errors in your care

Health care workers across the country are working hard to make health care safety a priority. Everyone has a role in making health care safe—physicians, health care executives, nurses, technologists, and you, the patient. You can play a vital role in making your surgical procedure safe by becoming an active, involved and informed member of your health care team. Here's what you can do to help make your surgery safe.

### 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](http://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 at 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.
- If you are having spine surgery, the mark will be made on the area of your spine on which your procedure is to be performed. However, this is just a "marker" to indicate that you are having spine surgery and to identify the general level of the surgery (neck, upper back, lower back). The exact location will be confirmed by your doctor.
- Ask your doctor if he or she plans to take a "time-out" with the surgical team just before beginning your surgery. During the time-out, the members of the health care team assure themselves that they are performing the correct procedure at the correct site and on the correct person.

### 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.