

SINAI HEALTH LINK

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HEALTH LINK

1-888-AT-SINAI (1-888-287-4624)

HOW TO BE A WELL-EDUCATED PATIENT

Do you remind your doctor and nurse to wash their hands? Have you ever told your nurse or pharmacist that you thought you were given the wrong medicine? If you were having surgery, would you ask the doctor to mark the body part to avoid confusion in the operating room?

If you said “yes” to these questions, you are probably a well-educated patient.

Everyone involved in your health care—doctors, nurses and technicians – is working for your good health and safety. But simple mistakes can happen in any kind of work.

“Medical mistakes can happen in doctors’ offices, hospitals, medical labs, pharmacies and at home,” says Dr. David Ansell, chairman



of the department of medicine at Mount Sinai Hospital. “The best way to prevent mistakes is to be an active member of your health-care team.”

Studies show that patients who speak up to their caregivers get better results from their health care. When you see your doctor, ask questions. If you don’t understand the answer, ask again. It’s your body and you have a right to know.

“You can learn a lot at your doctor’s office,” Dr. Ansell says. “Take notes on what your doctor says about your condition. Ask your doctor for written information you can keep. If you get home and think of more questions, call and ask them.”

ASSIGN AN ADVOCATE

If you’re going to the hospital, ask a family member or friend to be your advocate. That’s a person who helps you in the hospital.

An advocate can:

- ✓ **Make decisions about your care if you can’t speak for yourself.**
- ✓ **Ask questions you may not think of and remember the answers.**
- ✓ **Stay with you, even overnight, to make sure you’re getting what you need.**
- ✓ **Learn what care you will need at home.**

Ask at the hospital for a form you can fill out to tell the hospital your wishes about your care, including life support. Get four copies of the form and give one to the hospital, one to your doctor, and one to your advocate.

**FOR INFORMATION ON SINAI HEALTH AND COMMUNITY SERVICES,
CALL 1-888-AT-SINAI (1-888-287-4624) TTY (773-257-6289.)**

HEALTHY LIVING TIPS ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

Don't assume too much. When in doubt, ask.

- **If your doctor recommends a test, ask what the test will tell you.**
- **If you have the test, don't assume that "no news is good news." Call your doctor a few days after the test to get the results.**
- **Don't be afraid to ask for a second opinion. Your doctor can refer you to a specialist.**
- **Be sure you understand all forms before you sign them. If you don't, ask your doctor or nurse to explain them.**
- **If you plan to have surgery, make sure that you, your doctor, and your surgeon all agree on what will be done. Ask one person, such as your primary doctor, to be in charge of your care.**
- **Before you leave the hospital, ask your doctor how you should take care of yourself at home. If you'll be using any equipment, ask someone to show you and your advocate how it works.**

Ask your Sinai doctor

Q. *How do I know it's safe to take a new medicine?*



A. First, tell your doctor about all the medicines you already take. This includes prescriptions, over-the-counter drugs, herbs, and even vitamins. Tell your doctor about bad reactions you've had to medicines or foods. Then ask your doctor:

- What time of day should I take this medicine?
- Should I take it with or without food?
- Where should I keep it?
- What side effects does it have?
- Can I take it with my other medicines?

You also can ask your pharmacist these questions when you pick up your medicine.

KNOW WHO'S WHO ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

Throughout Sinai Health System, different caregivers have different jobs. Employees who come to your room will tell you their names, titles, and what they're doing for you. Look for their ID badges.

■ **Attending physicians** are the doctors in charge.

■ **Residents** are doctors learning a specialty, such as surgery or obstetrics. They work under the direction of attending physicians. Residents can write orders and prescriptions.

■ **Medical students** are still in school. They may take your medical history or help with an exam. They can't write orders, prescribe medications, or work on their own.



Make sure the health-care providers know who you are, too. They should check your wristband or ask your name before treating you.

Adapted from the "Speak Up!" campaign of the Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations.