

What can you do to get the best and safest health care possible?

Take five.

No, that doesn't mean "relax" (although that's good for you too). It means taking five steps toward becoming a better advocate for your health. People who are more involved in their care tend to get better results, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality reports. Being an involved patient also can help you avoid problems such as dangerous drug interactions.

So, consider taking these steps:

1. **Speak up.** Ask your doctor any questions you have about symptoms, medicines, tests, or treatments. Your physician should provide clear, honest answers.
2. **Monitor your medications.** Prescribed drugs can be dangerous when combined with certain other drugs, foods, herbal remedies, or over-the-counter medicines. To guard against such problems, show your doctor a list of all the medicines, vitamins, and herbal products you use. And when you pick up a new medicine at the pharmacy, check the label and ask the pharmacist to confirm it's the correct drug.
3. **Get results.** If your doctor orders medical tests, be sure you learn the findings and what they mean to your health. Call if you don't hear back from your doctor or the lab when expected. Don't assume results are fine if you don't hear anything.
4. **Be sure.** If your physician recommends a particular medicine or surgical procedure, make sure you know why. Ask if you have other options. What are the benefits or drawbacks of the treatment? Are there risks? If you still aren't sure how to proceed, it may be appropriate to request a second opinion from another doctor. If you go through with a treatment, make sure everyone taking care of you knows important facts about your health, such as any allergies or sensitivities you have to medicines.
5. **Follow up.** Care doesn't end once you leave a doctor's office or the hospital. Call your doctor if:
 - symptoms get worse
 - medicines cause side effects
 - you develop complications recovering from a procedure



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steps
to safer health care

