Mistakes can happen during surgery. Surgeons can do the wrong surgery. They can operate on the wrong part of your body. Or they can operate on the wrong person. Hospitals and other medical facilities that are accredited by The Joint Commission must follow a procedure that helps surgeons avoid these mistakes. (Facilities that are accredited by The Joint Commission are listed on The Joint Commission's Quality Check website: www.qualitycheck.org.)

Mistakes can also happen before or after surgery. A patient can take the wrong medicine. Or they don't understand the instructions about how to take care of themselves. As a patient, you can make your care safer by being an active, involved and informed member of your health care team.

The Joint Commission

SpeakUP™

Help avoid mistakes in your surgery

Preparing for your surgery

Ask your doctor

- ☐ Are there any prescription or over-the-counter medicines that you should not take before your surgery?
- ☐ Can you eat or drink before your surgery?
- ☐ If you have other questions, write them down. Take your list of questions with you when you see your doctor.

Ask someone you trust to

- ☐ Take you to and from the surgery facility.
- ☐ Be with you at the hospital. This person can make sure you get the care you need to feel comfortable and safe.

Before you leave home

- ☐ Shower, wash your hair, and remove any nail polish on your fingers and toes. Do not wear make-up. Your caregivers need to see your skin and nails to check your blood circulation.
- ☐ Leave your jewelry, money and other valuables at home.

At the surgery facility

The staff will ask you to sign an Informed Consent form. Read it carefully. It lists:

- ☐ Your name
- ☐ The kind of surgery you will have
- ☐ The risks of your surgery
- ☐ That you talked to your doctor about the surgery and asked questions
- ☐ Your agreement to have the surgery

Make sure everything on the form is correct. Make sure all of your questions have been answered. If you do not understand something on the form—speak up.

For your safety, the staff may ask you the same question many times. They will ask:

- ☐ Who you are
- ☐ What kind of surgery you are having
- ☐ The part of your body to be operated on

They will also double-check the records from your doctor's office.

Before your surgery

- ☐ A health care worker will mark the spot on your body to be operated on. Make sure they mark only the correct part and nowhere else. This helps avoid mistakes.
- ☐ Marking usually happens when you are awake. Sometimes you cannot be awake for the marking. If this happens, a family member or friend or another health care worker can watch the marking. They can make sure that your correct body part is marked.
- ☐ Your neck, upper back or lower back will be marked if you are having spine surgery. The surgeon will check the exact place on your spine in the operating room after you are asleep.
- ☐ Ask your surgeon if they will take a "time out" just before your surgery. This is done to make sure they are doing the right surgery on the right body part on the right person.

After your surgery

- ☐ Tell your doctor or nurse about your pain. Hospitals and other surgical facilities that are accredited by The Joint Commission must help relieve your pain.
- ☐ Ask questions about medicines that are given to you, especially new medicines. What is it? What is it for? Are there any side effects? Tell your caregivers about any allergies you have to medicines. If you have more questions about a medicine, talk to your doctor or nurse before taking it.
- ☐ Find about about any IV (intravenous) fluids that you are given. These are liquids that drip from a bag into your vein. Ask how long the liquid should take to "run out." Tell the nurse if it seems to be dripping too fast or too slow.
- ☐ Ask your doctor if you will need therapy or medicines after you leave the hospital.
- ☐ Ask when you can resume activities like work, exercise and travel.

www.jointcommission.org

The goal of the Speak Up™ program is to help patients become more informed and involved in their health care.