

# Patient Safety-OrthoInfo - AAOS

## Patient Safety

Patient safety. It takes a team.

Safety is a priority for your doctor and the other healthcare professionals involved in your treatment. In fact, everyone involved — including you — has a role in ensuring that your medical care is safe and effective.

The American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (AAOS) is committed to ensuring patient safety, and an important part of its ongoing patient safety efforts are public service campaigns that raise awareness of the measures patients themselves can take to ensure safety.

"Patient Safety: It Takes a Team" promotes the cooperation between doctor, patient, nurses, and hospital staff that is necessary for safe, successful surgeries. There are many things patients can do to become active members of their healthcare teams, like:

- Ask questions — be sure to speak up when you need more information from your doctor
- Involve a friend or family member in your care
- Be able to discuss your medical history — such as past surgeries, major illnesses, and family history of medical problems
- Keep a complete, accurate list of all your medications, including over-the-counter medications, vitamins, and nutritional supplements
- Tell your healthcare team about your allergies and any past reactions to anesthesia or medications
- Ask your doctor for educational resources to help you better understand your condition and treatment options

This page is an introduction to the wide range of information the AAOS has developed about patient safety. The goal of these resources is to help you become an active, involved member of your healthcare team.

## Communication Is the Cornerstone to Patient Safety

Open, honest communication with your doctor and medical team will help you become better informed about your treatment and the expected results.

The more information you have about your health care, the better equipped you are to make decisions that are best for you.

- Always be honest and complete when talking with your doctor. Information that seems incidental to you may be important to your doctor and medical team.

- Ask questions. It is common to forget some things we want to talk about with our doctors. The best thing to do is make a list.
- Speak up when you do not understand. If there is a language difference, or if you cannot hear or see very well, make sure you tell your doctor and medical team.
- Know the best way to reach your doctor after hours, such as by phone or e-mail.

### Invite a Friend to Join Your Healthcare Team

Involve a trusted family member or friend in your care. Health care is complicated, particularly if your doctor recommends surgery. A friend or family member can:

- Come with you to doctor appointments
- Stay with you in the hospital
- Help you to remember healthcare instructions
- Ask additional questions

### Your Office Visit

Your visit with an orthopaedic surgeon is an important meeting that can be most effective if you plan ahead. It is important that you give your doctor the information he or she needs and that you understand what your doctor is recommending.

- Come prepared. Write down your concerns about your condition, such as pain or loss of mobility. Make accurate written lists, including:
  - All your medications, including all prescriptions, over-the-counter medications, and nutritional herbal and vitamin supplements
  - Any surgeries you have had and when they occurred
  - Any family medical problems
  - All of your allergies (rash, hives, swelling) or unexpected reactions (nausea, drowsiness) to medications
- Take notes during your appointment and ask questions if you do not understand something, such as the reason for your doctor's recommendations, or the instructions for taking medication.
- Ask your doctor for handouts or brochures so that you can learn about your condition and treatment options. Your doctor may also refer you to a website for more information.

For further information about planning for your appointment with an orthopaedic surgeon: [Getting the Most Out of Your Doctor's Visit](#)

### Participate in Decisions About Your Health Care

You are the center of your healthcare team. Work with your doctor and other healthcare professionals, and participate in all decisions about your treatment.

- Understand your treatment plan and discuss it fully with your doctor and medical team. Make sure you can answer questions about your care, such as:
  - What is my diagnosis?
  - What are the treatment options? Nonsurgical and surgical?
  - What is the plan for my care? If surgery is needed, what will be done?
- Understand how long treatment will last, and how you should feel

For further information about how to actively participate in your treatment: [Patients Are Important Members of the Healthcare Team](#)

## Preparing for Surgery

When we go for surgery we turn over our care to highly trained doctors, nurses, and hospital staff. However, studies show that patients who understand their treatment and recovery are more likely to have better outcomes.

- Talk to your healthcare team about the surgery and your hospital stay. Some examples of helpful questions to ask your surgeon include:
  - What are the benefits and risks of this surgery?
  - What are the possible complications and how likely are they to occur?
  - Are there tests or other medical evaluations needed before surgery? How, when, and where do I do them?
  - What should I expect after surgery? What will be my recovery time?
- Be sure to provide your healthcare team with a list of all the medications you take — including prescription drugs, over-the-counter medications, and vitamins and supplements. It is particularly important before surgery that your care team knows whether you take a blood thinner medication or diabetes medications.
- Talk to your doctor about any allergies you have.
- If you or a family member has had any problems with anesthesia in the past, make sure your doctor knows.
- Take steps before surgery to help you manage your first weeks at home. For example:
  - Arrange for help with daily tasks like shopping and laundry
  - If your mobility will be limited while you heal, prepare your home by rearranging furniture, removing rugs, and adding items like safety bars in the bathroom
  - Talk to your doctor's office about finding assistive items such as reachers or long-handled sponges

For further information about preparing for surgery:

[Questions to Ask Your Doctor Before Surgery](#)

### Preventing Medical Errors

Medical errors can be prevented. Safety measures must be implemented and adhered to on all levels of the healthcare system — from doctors and hospital staff to patients and insurance providers — to ensure a safe health care system.

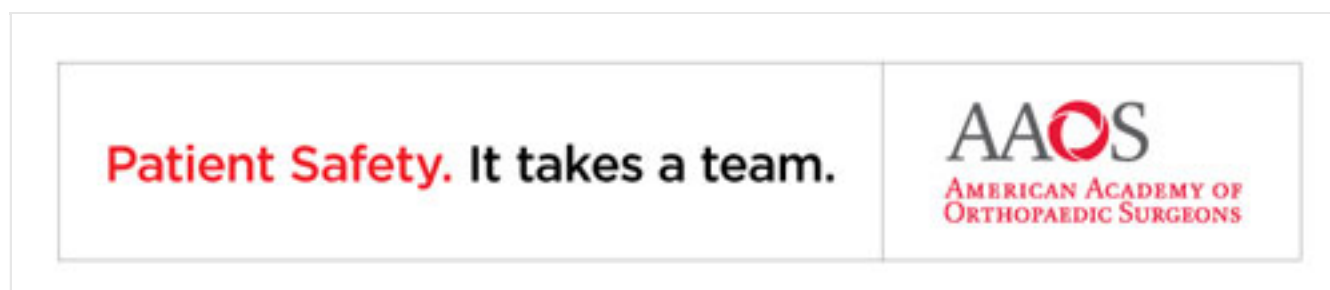
The American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (AAOS) takes patient safety very seriously.

In 1998, the AAOS kicked off the campaign — "Sign Your Site" — which calls for a national effort among surgeons, hospitals and other healthcare providers to mark the operative site with their initials in order to prevent wrong-site surgeries. Since that time, raising awareness among the general public about wrong-site surgery has been an ongoing AAOS initiative, and several public service messages have been promoted over the years.

The AAOS also has an active Patient Safety Committee that continually develops programs to improve patient safety on national, state, and local levels. In addition, the AAOS works with other healthcare organizations and government agencies to measure and improve healthcare quality, and to ensure the accurate reporting of errors. The Academy supports the U.S. Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services "Speak Up" campaign to prevent healthcare errors.

Most recently, the AAOS has developed new safety programs for surgeons as part of its TeamSTEPPS Initiative. TeamSTEPPS (Team Strategies & Tools to Enhance Performance & Patient Safety) is a national training and support network created by the Department of Defense and the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.

The goal of TeamSTEPPS is to produce highly effective medical teams that optimize the use of information, people, and resources to achieve the best clinical outcomes for their patients.



Last reviewed: December 2013

*AAOS does not endorse any treatments, procedures, products, or physicians referenced herein. This information is provided as an educational service and is not intended to serve as medical advice. Anyone seeking specific orthopaedic advice or assistance should consult his or her orthopaedic surgeon, or locate one in your area through the AAOS "Find an Orthopaedist" program on this*

*website.*