

Working together for patient safety: Tips for patients and families



Palliative Care Unit
McGill University Health Centre

Centre universitaire
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McGill University
Health Centre

Keeping patients comfortable and safe is a priority for us on the palliative care unit. This means preventing any unintended events while in the hospital, such as:

- hospital related infections
- falls
- bedsores
- medication or test mistakes

Health care team members take many actions to prevent such events, such as:

- washing hands
- helping a patient to the bathroom
- helping a patient change position in bed
- checking the patient's hospital bracelet

Patients and families also have a role in promoting patient safety. This booklet will give you some tips about how you can be an active partner in care while in the hospital. We believe that when we all work together, the best and safest care is made possible.

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IMPORTANT: PLEASE READ

Information provided by this booklet is for educational purposes. It is not intended to replace the advice or instruction of a professional healthcare practitioner, or to substitute medical care. Contact a qualified healthcare practitioner if you have any questions concerning your care.

Speak up!

- Let us know if you have any concerns.
- Ask questions if there is something you don't understand. It is okay to ask again if you still don't understand. You can also ask that information be written down to help you remember.
- Tell us if you notice any change. This way, a team member can look into it. An example is starting to cough while eating or drinking.
- Become familiar with the plan of care. This can include medications, tests or treatments. It can also involve learning about the routines on the unit.
- If something doesn't seem right to you, **speak up**.



How can I help prevent infection?

Hospitals have many germs that can make people sick. **Hand washing is the best way to prevent infection.** The patient and anyone coming into contact with the patient should wash their hands.

When to wash your hands:

- When entering the room
- After leaving the room
- After blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing
- Before touching food
- After using the bathroom

How to wash your hands:

- Wet your hands and apply soap
- Wash all parts of your hands and wrists for 15 to 30 seconds
- Turn off the tap with a paper towel



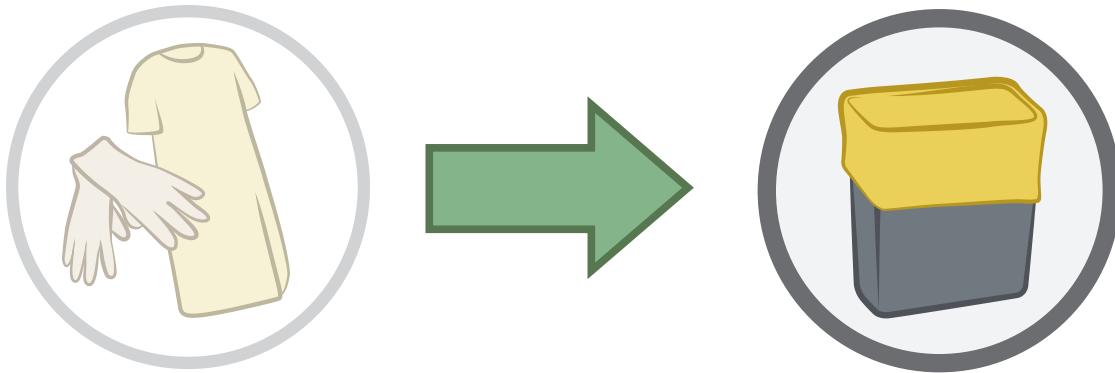
How to use waterless soap:

- Make sure your hands are dry
- Use enough solution to cover your hands and wrists
- Rub it well over all parts of your hands and wrists for 15 to 30 seconds
- Allow it to dry.



If you need to get water or linens, make sure your hands are clean or ask a staff member.

Follow any precaution signs which are posted outside a patient room. Do not leave an isolation room still wearing your gloves and gown. This helps to prevent the spread of infection. If you are not sure what to do, ask a staff member.



How can I protect the skin?

Sitting or lying in the same position causes pressure on the skin. This can lead to bedsores. Whenever possible, we would like to prevent this from happening.

What you can do:

- Try to move around as much as you can. Remember that any change in position, even a small shift, can help to relieve pressure.
- You can ask the nurse if a special surface for the chair or mattress for the bed would be helpful for you.



How can I help prevent falls?

Falling is a common event which can happen in the hospital. A fall can lead to serious injury.

How you can help prevent falls:

- Ask the staff if it is safe for you to get up on your own. If it is not, always ask for help.
- Make sure the bed is at the lowest position.
- If you need glasses or a hearing aid, wear them.
- If you need a walker or cane, use it.
- Get up slowly. If you are dizzy, ask for help.
- Wear shoes or anti-skid slippers when out of bed.
- Avoid long clothing which can lead to tripping.
- Keep the bedside as clutter-free as possible.
- Keep a bedside light on at night.
- Let us know if you have already had a fall or near-fall.
- The staff will write any specific instructions on the white board next to your bed.



For more tips on how to prevent falls, refer to the orange poster “Help our team to prevent a fall”.

How can I make sure that medications and tests are right for me?

- Make sure that you are always wearing a hospital bracelet which is readable.
- If you have allergies, make sure that you are wearing an allergy bracelet.
- When you first come to the hospital, it is important to provide us with the most recent list of your medications. This includes any over the counter or natural products.
- Do not take medications brought from home unless this has been approved by your doctor. Bring them home or give them to the nurse.
- If you think you are having side effects, tell your doctor or nurse.
- When going home, make sure that you understand how to take your medications.
- When you are given medications or are having a test:
 - the nurse or other team member should check your hospital bracelet(s)
 - it is okay to ask what medication you are receiving or what test you are having and why
 - if anything doesn't seem right, **speak up**.



Remember:

We are here to provide answers and explanations. We want to work with you to provide the best care. Everyone plays a role in promoting safer care in the hospital. It is a team effort between health care workers, patients and family.

Notes:
