



JOSEPH
GREENWALD
& LAAKE, PA

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When we go to the doctor or the hospital, we expect our healthcare providers to perform their responsibilities without any errors. But the truth is that physicians are only human and are capable of making mistakes or committing oversights – just like the rest of us.

Unfortunately, though, a mistake in the medical field often has much more catastrophic consequences than an error made in most other professions. The wrong diagnosis or treatment regimen could result in injury or even death.

While those who have suffered injury at the hands of a negligent healthcare provider can file a medical malpractice lawsuit to recover damages for the wrong committed, the monetary award doesn't necessarily make up for the burden of the years – or even lifetime – of pain caused by the erroneous act. That's why the best solution for [medical malpractice](#) often is to attempt to prevent it from ever taking place.

Empowered Patients

The first line of defense in medical malpractice is you, the patient. While the legal responsibility falls on the medical provider, patients can educate themselves to help reduce the chances of a serious medical error being made. The following is a checklist you can use to empower yourself to avoid healthcare errors and to prevent becoming a victim of malpractice.

- **Know your medications:** It is imperative that you know the full extent of medications you are taking before you see a medical provider. Inform every healthcare professional you see about the list of medications you take. This can help prevent you from receiving a prescription that has a serious reaction to another drug you are currently taking. Put the list in writing and take it with you to every appointment with every doctor.
- **Know what allergies you have:** Just as some medications can react with one another, some people's bodies can have negative reactions to certain medications. For example, someone who is allergic to penicillin could suffer serious health consequences if given certain antibiotics. To help prevent serious illness or injury, share the full extent of your allergies with every healthcare provider you see.
- **Keep a journal:** Document your healthcare journey. This is important for a couple reasons. First, by taking notes about your condition, your healthcare visits and your treatment plan, you are establishing a record that you can refer to if you need reminders about doctors' instructions or if you need to explain your history of care to a new healthcare provider. In addition, having this kind of documentation can work toward your favor in a medical malpractice lawsuit should one of your healthcare providers commit an error.
- **Ask questions, and do your research:** Being an informed patient is important to your health and safety. Do not hesitate to ask your medical provider follow-up questions during or after your visit. Even before you seek out medical care, conduct independent research about your health issue – including finding information related to specific tests, procedures and medications your provider might suggest. Make sure you are getting your information from a reliable source, such as the [Mayo Clinic website](#).
- **Ask a relative or friend to accompany you:** Besides offering the moral support you might need to overcome a health scare, a friend or relative can help serve as your eyes and ears in the doctor's office. Not only can they help you remember the information and directions given to you by your healthcare provider, they can also serve as your informed advocate should you lose the ability to make medical decisions for yourself.

While the best-case scenario is that your healthcare needs are adequately attended to, there is always the chance that your provider – or another participant in the management of your care – will commit an error that could turn into a serious cause of action for a medical malpractice lawsuit. By empowering yourself with the tips above, you can help minimize the likelihood of an accident that could result in long-lasting pain and suffering.

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