

# SPEAK UP FOR BETTER SAFER HEALTH CARE

## Safer medical tests



Medical and laboratory tests are important aids for doctors to manage your healthcare. However, sometimes the wrong test is ordered, test results are misunderstood, or your doctor gets the results too late to give you the best treatment. This brochure includes questions and answers to help you prepare for your test.

### If I need a lab test, an x-ray, or another kind of test, what should I ask my doctor:

- > How will the test be done?
- > How accurate will the results be?
- > What are the benefits and risks of the test?
- > How and when will I receive the results?

### What if I don't understand the medical forms I'm asked to sign?

Ask staff to explain the forms. Don't sign anything until you understand what you are signing. Also, keep your eyeglasses with you so you can read forms, labels and other information.

### How do I know that the test results are mine?

Staff should ask for your full name and another piece of information, such as your birth date. If they don't, speak up. Ask to see the labels on the containers that your samples are put in. The label should have your full name and another piece of personal information. Also, make sure that the containers are immediately sealed to prevent mislabelling and contamination.

### What if I don't understand what is being done and why?

Ask the healthcare worker to stop the test and ask them to explain what he or she is doing.

### How can I be sure that the test I get is the one ordered by my doctor?

Get a copy of the test order from your doctor and take it to the test. Also, if you think you are about to get the wrong test, don't be afraid to inform the staff.

### Can I have a copy of the test results?

You are entitled to copies of your results. Ask staff for a copy of the results to keep for your records or take to doctors appointments.

### I'm supposed to get a 'contrast agent'. What is this?

A 'contrast agent' is a liquid that makes organs and blood vessels more visible on X-rays and other tests. If you get a contrast agent and begin itching or have trouble breathing, tell the healthcare worker. If you are pregnant or nursing, ask your doctor and the healthcare worker if there is anything that should be done before or after the test to protect you and your baby.

### What is a 'MRI' and how can I prepare for it?

MRI stands for magnetic resonance imaging. The MRI machine has magnets inside it that are used to take a picture of your body. These strong magnets can quickly pull metal objects into the MRI machine, which can cause injuries. The machine also can heat up metal objects causing burns. If you get a MRI, be sure to remove all metal from your body—such as hairpins—and tell the healthcare worker if you have any implants in your body.

### My test results show something is wrong. What should I do?

Talk with your doctor and with one or more specialists to decide what options are available and what the best treatment is for you. You'll be able to make the best decision when you have more information.

### What should I do if I have a bad experience at the laboratory or test facility?

If the lab or facility is part of a hospital, call them so that they can correct the problem. You can also file a complaint with the hospital or clinic patient complaints officer or your relevant state independent health complaints body or authority. Your State or Territory health department can provide you with contact details.

### Don't assume that no news is good news.

Always ask how and when you should get your test results. Follow-up with the doctor who ordered the test. Talking with your doctor and other healthcare workers can be important in getting the treatment you need as soon as possible.

### Questions to ask your doctor or treating specialist:

- > Why is this test being done? What should it tell me about my health?
- > Can I get a copy of my test order to take to the place where the test is being done?
- > Are there any special written instructions to assist me in understanding the test and preparing for it?

- > Are there any foods or drinks I should avoid before or after the test? For how long before or after the test should I avoid the food or drink?
- > Should I take my medicine before the test?
- > Is there anything else I need to do to prepare for the test?
- > Are there any side effects of the test? Will it be painful or uncomfortable? Is it unusual to have pain or discomfort?
- > Can I call or visit the laboratory or test facility before I go to take the test?

### Questions to ask the healthcare workers who give the test or take your blood:

- > Is this facility accredited? All Medibank Private Members' Choice hospitals are required to be accredited.
- > Have you washed your hands?
- > Do you need to wear gloves while you take my blood or sample?
- > When will the results be ready? How will my doctor and I be informed of the results?
- > Will you quickly notify me if the test shows a problem that needs immediate action? Will you notify my doctor too?
- > Can you give me a telephone number to call if I have questions?

Adapted from Joint Commission on Accreditation of Health Care Organization (2005). Help prevent medical test mistakes. ([www.jointcommission.org/PatientSafety/Speakup/](http://www.jointcommission.org/PatientSafety/Speakup/)).

The information contained in this document is general in nature and comprises suggestions for how you may actively participate in ensuring that you receive the best quality healthcare. It is intended as a guide and does not cover every possible circumstance. Your GP, specialists, nurses and other healthcare providers are the persons who are best placed to provide you with specific advice in relation to your particular medical condition and health.