

medical mishaps

It's shocking but true: Each year at U.S. hospitals there are 400,000 preventable drug-related mistakes, and another 2 million patients acquire infections while admitted. To be on the safe side, make sure you—and those you care about—follow these safety tips from Martine Ehrenclou, author of *Critical Conditions: The Essential Hospital Guide to Get Your Loved One Out Alive* (Lemon Grove Press).

prevent medication mistakes

✓ Avoid adverse drug reactions or interactions by informing all doctors and nurses involved of any allergies or current medications.

✓ Record in a notebook what drugs are part of the treatment plan, including the name, dosage, shape, color and size of the pills.

✓ If any meds are introduced that don't match what you've already written down, don't be afraid to speak up and find out why.

stop infections before they start

✓ Ask medical staff and visitors to wash their hands, use antibacterial gel or put on disposable gloves before coming close to you.

✓ Sick people (even those with just a mild cold) in the hospital room should always wear a mask to keep germs from spreading.

✓ Before having surgery, ask if antibiotics will be prescribed before or after, because they may help lower the risk of infection.

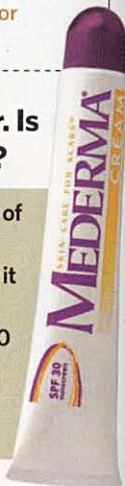
BRUSHING UP

If you're like most people, you may not be taking the best care of your teeth. In fact, only one-third of Americans say they're doing an "excellent" job when it comes to dental health, according to a recent survey from the American Dental Association. To keep your smile bright, brush and floss twice daily and alert your dentist to any of the following symptoms:

- + Puffy gums that bleed during brushing or flossing
- + Dry mouth or bad breath
- + Loose teeth that you can wiggle
- + A mouth sore that lasts for more than a week or two

Q I had a mole removed and it left a scar. Is there anything I can do to get rid of it?

Whether you're bothered by a new or existing mark that's a result of surgery, injury or acne, you can make it less noticeable. OTC treatments can lighten your scar and soften its texture. Protecting it from the sun also helps because UV rays can cause it to darken. Look for a combination product, like Mederma's Cream with SPF 30 (\$18.50 for a 20-gram tube). Massage the greaseless gel into the spot three times a day, and if your scar doesn't fade within a few months, call a dermatologist to discuss other options.



Forgive Me "Sorry" may be the hardest word, but the sooner you say it, the better you'll feel. Not knowing if you'll be forgiven can cause more anxiety than negative feedback, says a Canadian study. Stress temporarily raises blood pressure, and frequent spikes increase the risk for heart disease, so don't delay.