Medical Information, Please

You may feel like your health care providers ask a lot of questions about your personal medical history, and it may seem like you repeat the same information over and over. Yet, these questions are an important way to eliminate medical mistakes and to make sure that you receive the best care. One of the best ways to avoid medical errors is to ask questions and to become an active participant in your care. This also is true when you go for a diagnostic imaging examination.

The skilled imaging professionals who perform your examination are educated to ask certain things about your medical history that can help with the exam. Also known as radiologic technologists, they have received specialized education in radiation protection, patient care and radiographic positioning and procedures. One of their roles is to verify and check the information sent by the doctor who orders the exam. Medical records often may be incomplete, inaccurate or unavailable, and old records may not have followed you to a new location or a different medical office.

Before you go to your examination, it's important to know what kind of information the radiologic technologist will ask for and to be prepared to answer his or her questions completely and accurately. Here are some suggestions of ways to communicate vital information to the technologist.

**Why Are You Here?**
The technologist may begin by asking the reason that you're having the imaging exam. It's helpful to describe symptoms you've been experiencing such as pain or to point out the part of your body that's causing a problem. The technologist will want to know about any recent surgeries, what they were for and when they occurred. Be sure to tell the technologist if you have any type of medical implant, such as an artificial hip.

If your doctor's office gave you instructions to follow before the exam, bring a copy for the technologist to check. Also, if you have a medical-alert bracelet or necklace, be sure to show it to the technologist.

**Medical Conditions**
Tell the technologist about any long-standing (chronic) or newly diagnosed conditions you have, such as diabetes or hypertension. Sometimes treatments for these diseases may affect your imaging exam. For example, a patient with diabetes may be taking a blood sugar medicine or an individual with hypertension may be taking a diuretic (a medication that increases your urine output). Be sure to tell the technologist if you are on any kind of dietary restriction or if you have been told not to eat or drink anything for a certain period of time.

**Medications**
Prescription medication information can be an important factor in your examination. Either write down the names of all your medicines or bring your medication bottles in a plastic bag to show the technologist. Be sure to include any over-the-counter drugs that you take on a regular basis. The technologist will need to know what the medicine is for and if you took the medicine that day.

**Allergies**
The technologist may ask whether you have any allergies. This includes if you are allergic to any medication, such as antibiotics or products that are applied to the skin, or food, such as shrimp or peanuts. It's important to inform the technologist if you have any type of asthma or have had a previous allergic reaction to contrast media (a substance that helps make organs easier to see on a medical image).