



KNOWLEDGE IS THE BEST MEDICINE

Things you should know about the medicines you take

Repeated studies have shown that as many as 50% of patients don't take their medicines properly.

Whatever medicine you take, whether it's a tablet for hay fever or something you take every day for your heart, it is very important to understand what you are taking, why you are taking it, how to take it, and what side-effects might be. To find out more, start by talking with your doctor or your pharmacist, that's what they're there for. Don't be afraid to ask questions. You have the right to ask. You have the right to know.

With your doctor or pharmacist

Write down any questions you have before you visit your doctor so you do not forget them when you are in the surgery.

Tell your doctor about all of the medicines you are taking. Some medicines interact with each other, which can change the way they work.

Talk to your doctor about any allergies or reactions you have experienced in the past.

Make sure that you understand the instructions on how to take your medicine.

Ask about possible side effects and what to do if you experience them.

Ask if there is anything that you should or should not eat or drink while taking the medicine.

Get to know your pharmacist. He or she is there to help and has a record of the different medicines you get from that pharmacy.

It is advisable to get all your prescription medicines from the same pharmacy.

If you find it hard to remember when to take your medicines, ask your doctor or pharmacist for some suggestions.

Helpful hint

Don't expect a prescription every time you visit your doctor. You may not need one.

At home

Take your medicine exactly as directed on the label. Too much or too little of your medicine could be harmful.

If you forget to take your medicine, don't double the next dose. Ask your doctor or pharmacist.

Don't share your medicine with others or use medicine not prescribed for you.

Finish all of your medicines unless your doctor tells you not to.

Don't save a prescription for future use unless your doctor tells you to.

When certain medicines are mixed with alcohol, the result can be harmful. Ask your doctor or pharmacist.

Check expiry dates. Don't use outdated medicines.

How to read the label on your medicine bottle

The label on your medicine bottle contains important information. Here is an example of a typical label for a prescription medicine. Your label may look different but it will show:

- Your name
- The name of your doctor
- The name, address and telephone number of the pharmacy
- The reference number of the prescription
- The name of the medicine and its strength
- Instructions on how to take the medicine
- The quantity of tablets/liquid

Ask your pharmacist if you have any questions when you pick up your prescription.

Things to watch for

Sometimes when taking medicines, things we don't expect can happen. That's the time to call your doctor. Here are examples of signs to watch for:

- Skin rashes or itchiness
- Difficulty breathing
- Unusual headaches or dizziness
- Unexplained or easy bruising
- Mood changes
- A loss of appetite, nausea or vomiting
- Slurred speech, memory loss or impaired judgement
- Changes in sleeping patterns such as unusual drowsiness or recurring unpleasant dreams.

There is the possibility that these symptoms may be the result of the medication, but they could be connected to other causes. In any case, contact your doctor or pharmacist immediately.

Keep it safe

Keep your medicine in a cool dry place, out of sunlight.

Some medicines are stored in the refrigerator, while others are kept at room temperature. Ask your pharmacist.

Don't keep your medicines in the bathroom. The heat and moisture could damage the medicine.

Don't hoard medicines, unless they are part of your family First Aid kit.

Store your medicine in its original container.

Keep all medicines, including seemingly harmless medications like cough bottles, safely locked away and out of reach of children.

Question your doctor or pharmacist

Medicines information: it's yours for the asking!

Your doctor and your pharmacist are the experts on your medicines.

Even so, it's important for you to learn as much as possible about any medicines you take.

The more you know about your medicine, the more you become a team player in your own health care.

I hate to ask...

Many of us are uncomfortable asking questions. Perhaps we feel our questions are embarrassing, unimportant, or we think that our doctor or pharmacist is too busy and we shouldn't bother them.

Remember doctors and pharmacists are there to help. Here are some suggestions that will help you:

- Before visiting your doctor or pharmacist think about what you want to ask them.
- Make a list of your questions and take it with you.
- If you find it difficult to ask questions, take a friend or family member with you.
- If the answer confuses you, ask your doctor or pharmacist to explain it again. Tell them what you don't understand.
- If it will help you, write the answers down. Ask for written material on the subject so you can read it later.

Remember, you have the right to get answers to your questions.

Questions to ask

Here are some important questions to ask your doctor or pharmacist about your prescription medicine:

- What is the name of the medicine?
- Why am I taking it?
- What will it do for me?
- Is there anything I should do as well as taking this medicine?
- Do I have any alternatives to this medicine?
- Are there any side effects? Which ones should I report?
- Do you want to see me while I'm taking this medicine? If so, when?
- What if I need a repeat prescription?
- Is there any patient information available about this medicine?
- Will this medicine affect any of the other medicines I am taking?

(Remember to ask about prescription and non-prescription medicines.)

How do I make medicine work best for me?

Your pharmacist can answer many of your questions about the medicines you take. Be sure to talk to your doctor or pharmacist.

- How often should I take the medicine?
- When should I take it?
Before, with, after, or between meals? At bedtime? Whenever I need it?
- Can I drive a car? What about physical exercise or air travel?
- What should I do if I miss a dose?
- How long should I continue taking it?
- How should I store my medicine?
- Any food or beverages I should avoid?
- Is there anything else I should know?

Helpful tips

If you have problems swallowing your medicine, your doctor or pharmacist may have some suggestions.

If you have trouble opening your medicine ask your pharmacist for a different type of container.

If you find it hard to remember when to take your medicine ask your doctor or pharmacist for some suggestions.

REMEMBER

You have the right to:

Be informed

Ask questions

Be involved
Ask for help