

Medication Safety



Taking Medicines Safely

People age 65 and older take more prescription and over-the-counter medicines than any other age group. Older people as a group tend to have more long-term, chronic illnesses such as arthritis, diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart disease.

Because they may have a number of health problems or issues at the same time, it is common for older people to take many different drugs. To avoid risk and get the best results from your medicines, here are some tips on how to take medicines safely and manage them wisely.

Taking Medicines Safely - How to Take Medicines

There are two types of medications: drugs your doctor prescribes for you, called prescription drugs, and those you can get without a doctor's prescription, called over-the-counter drugs. It is important to realize that over-the-counter products include many different substances such as vitamins and minerals, herbal and dietary supplements, laxatives, cold medicines, and antacids.

If your doctor prescribes a medication for your condition, make sure that you find out as much about it as you can and that you learn to take it properly. Ask the following questions and write down the answers before leaving the doctor's office.

Questions to ask about the medicine itself:

- ✓ What is the name of the medicine and why am I taking it?
- ✓ What is the name of the condition this medicine will treat?
- ✓ How long will it take to work?
- ✓ How should I store the medication? Does it need to be refrigerated?
- ✓ Can the pharmacist substitute a less expensive, generic form of the medicine?

Ask your doctor, pharmacist, or nurse about the right way to take any medicine before you start to use it. Ask questions when you don't know the meaning of a word, or when instructions aren't clear. Here are some specific questions to ask:

Questions to ask about taking medicine:

- ✓ When should I take it? As needed, or on a schedule? Before, with, or between meals? At bedtime?
- ✓ How often should I take it?
- ✓ How long will I have to take it?
- ✓ How will I feel once I start taking this medicine?
- ✓ How will I know if this medicine is working?

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- ✓ If I forget to take it, what should I do?
- ✓ What side effects might I expect? Should I report them?
- ✓ Can this medicine interact with other prescription and over-the-counter medicines – including herbal and dietary supplements – that I am taking now?

Taking different medicines is not always easy to do properly. It may be hard to remember what each medicine is for, and how and when you should take it.

Here are some helpful hints about taking medicines:

- ✓ Check the label on your medicine before taking it to make sure that it is for the correct person – you.
- ✓ Read and save any written information that comes with the medicine.
- ✓ Take the medicine according to the schedule on the label.
- ✓ Don't take more or less than the prescribed amount of any medicine.
- ✓ If swallowing tablets is difficult, ask your doctor or pharmacist whether there is a liquid form of the medicine or whether you could crush your tablets. However, do NOT break, crush, or chew tablets without asking a health professional first. NEVER break, crush, or chew a capsule.
- ✓ Get into the habit of checking the expiration dates on your medicine bottles, and throw away medicine that has expired.
- ✓ Try to set and follow a routine for taking your medicines.

Source: <http://nihseniorhealth.gov/takingmedicines/takingmedicinessafely/01.html>

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