

# Information about Your Medicine

## Why is medicine information important?

Good health starts with good information. There are thousands of prescription medicines, nonprescription medicines, supplements, natural remedies, and vitamins. When used the right way, these medicines may be helpful or even life saving. Using them the wrong way or in the wrong combination, however, may be dangerous. Before you take any medicine, you should know:

- The name of the medicine
- What the medicine is used for
- How much medicine to take and when you should take it
- The side effects of the medicine
- If the medicine will interact with other medicines or food
- How to store the medicine safely

## What is the name of the medicine?

It's important for you to know the names of all of your medicines so you can tell your healthcare providers what medicines you are taking. Many prescription and nonprescription drugs are available as both generic and brand name products. A generic drug is the same as a brand name drug in dosage, safety, strength, and quality. Depending on your prescription, the medicine labels may show a brand name or the generic name.

Generic drugs look different from brand name drugs. This is because trademark laws don't allow generics to look exactly like brand name drugs. The medicine is the same but additives that don't change how the medicine works may be used. Generic drugs are usually less expensive than brand name drugs because they cost less to make. Many insurance companies require that prescriptions be filled with a generic drug if one is available. However, not all medicines are available in a generic form.

Never assume that a medicine looks different from the brand name drug just because it is generic. Check with the pharmacist that you have the correct medicine before you leave the pharmacy.

## What is the medicine used for?

Medicines can be confusing, especially if you are taking medicines for more than one condition. If you don't know why you are taking a particular drug and the label does not say what it is for, ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist. You can write on the label the reason you are taking the medicine (for example, "heart" or "cough"). This information could be very important if you become ill and need help from a friend or family member. In many pharmacies they can put the reason on the printed label for you.

If you are pregnant or breastfeeding, ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist if the medicine is safe to use. Many medicines can be harmful to a baby.

Some products cannot be used for very young children. Read and follow label directions and warnings on ALL medicines. Check with a pharmacist if you have questions.

## **How much, how often, and when?**

Follow the directions that come with your medicine, including information about food or alcohol. Make sure you know how and when to take your medicine. Don't change your dose without consulting your healthcare provider. Some medicines start to work right away; others may take several weeks before you feel better. Don't take more or less than you are supposed to take.

If you forget a dose of your medicine, don't try to make up for it by taking more with the next dose unless your provider has told you to do this.

You can buy a daily medicine reminder box from your pharmacy. The easiest kind to use has 7 compartments, one for each day of the week. Look for a transparent box so that you can see at a glance if you have taken your medicine for the day. Keep the box on a kitchen counter or some place where you won't miss seeing it each day. If children live with you or visit you sometimes, keep the box safely out of their reach.

Some medicines irritate the stomach, especially if there is no food in the stomach. It's best to take these medicines with meals. Other medicines work better if your stomach is empty. If the label does not say whether to take the medicine with or without food, ask your pharmacist for more information.

Many medicines are available in different forms, such as tablets, capsules, liquids, sprays, lotions or injections. If you have trouble taking a medicine in one form, ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist if there are other options.

If you are taking a medicine for a chronic condition, such as high blood pressure or high cholesterol, you may not have symptoms of the problem. It's important to keep taking your medicines as directed for these and any other chronic conditions you have even when you don't have any symptoms. The effects of the medicine can usually be measured only at your checkups.

## **What about side effects?**

Many medicines have side effects. A side effect is a symptom or problem caused by the medicine. Ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist what side effects the medicine may cause and what you should do if you have side effects.

A side effect is not the same as an allergic reaction to a medicine. An allergic reaction can cause sudden rash, trouble breathing, swelling in the mouth or face, nausea, vomiting, lightheadedness, or other symptoms. It may happen soon after you start to take it or any time while you are taking it. Allergic reactions to some medicines may not happen until after hours, days, or weeks of taking them. Tell your healthcare provider and pharmacist if you have any allergies to medicines.

Some medicines can affect the way you think and act. Find out if it's OK to drive, operate machinery, exercise, or travel by plane while taking a medicine.

## **Will the medicine interact with my other medicines or with food?**

A drug interaction is a change in the way that a medicine works when you take it with another medicine or with certain foods. Alcohol, tobacco, prescription and nonprescription drugs, vitamins, natural remedies, and some foods may interact with your medicine.

If you have a drug interaction:

- The drug may not work as well as it should.
- You may have different side effects.

To avoid problems caused by drug interactions, keep a list of your medicines with you. List all of the prescription medicines, nonprescription medicines, supplements, natural remedies, and vitamins that you take. Tell all healthcare providers who treat you about all of the products you are taking.

## **How do I use the medicine safely?**

- Unless it is supposed to be taken only as you need it, don't save a medicine to use at a later time. Most medicines, such as antibiotics, are meant to be taken until they are all gone, which may be well after you are feeling better.
- Try to get all of your prescriptions filled at the same place. Your pharmacist can help make sure that all of your medicines are safe to take together.
- Don't share prescription medicines with other people, even when they seem to have the same symptoms. What may be good for you may be harmful to others.
- Store medicines according to the directions on the label.
- Keep all medicines out of the reach of children.
- Keep medicines taken by mouth separate from other medicines. Some medicines used on the skin, for example, may be poisonous if you swallow them.
- Keep medicines in their original containers unless you use a dose-reminder box. Don't take medicines from unlabeled containers.
- Don't keep medicines on a bedside table (except emergency medicines, such as nitroglycerin). You may take the wrong medicine or wrong dose when you are not fully awake or alert. Don't take medicines in the dark.
- Check for expiration dates on all medicines. If a drug does not have an expiration date, write down the date you bought it. Check with a pharmacist before using it if it is more than 1 year old.
- If you don't understand what you have been told about your medicines, ask for the instructions to be explained again. A good way to check your understanding is to ask yourself if you could explain it to your family when you get home.
  - Take notes on what you are told about your medicines.

- Ask for additional written information to take home.
- Call back if you have additional questions.

You may find that it helps to ask someone, like a friend or relative, to go with you to your appointments or to pick up your medicines. They can listen with you and, if necessary, take notes for you.

For more information, you may want to contact:

- National Council on Patient Information and Education  
301-656-8565  
<http://www.talkaboutrx.org>.

The National Council on Patient Information and Education (NCPPIE) is a nonprofit organization. Its goal is to promote the safe and effective use of prescription medicines.

Developed by RelayHealth.

*This content is reviewed periodically and is subject to change as new health information becomes available. The information is intended to inform and educate and is not a replacement for medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment by a healthcare professional.*

# My Medicines

List ALL medicines you take even if you only take them just when you need them (such as for allergies or a headache). Write why you take the medicine (for example, high blood pressure, more energy).

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Address:</b>
<b>Phone:</b>	
<b>Birth date:</b>	
<b>Emergency Contact: Phone:</b>	<b>Relationship:</b>

Make sure you list all:

- 1) Prescription medicines (such as nitroglycerin, albuterol)
- 2) Nonprescription medicines (such as aspirin, antacids, nasal spray)
- 3) Supplements, natural remedies, and vitamins (such as ginkgo, vitamin B-12, saw palmetto)

Date Started	Name of Medicine	Reason for Taking	How Much I Take and How Often

<b>Medicine I am allergic to:</b>	<b>What happens when I take this medicine:</b>	
<b>Immunization Record</b> <i>(Record the date of last vaccination, if known)</i>	Tetanus shot(s)	Flu vaccine(s)
Pneumonia Vaccine(s)	Hepatitis Vaccine(s)	Other

- **Always keep this form with you.** Keep one copy in your wallet and another copy handy at home in case of an emergency.
- **Take this form to all healthcare provider and dentist visits** or when you need to have lab tests, surgery, or any other hospital procedure.
- **Write down all changes made to your medicines on this form.** If you stop taking a certain medicine, draw a line through it and write the date you stopped taking it. Ask your healthcare provider, pharmacist, or a family member to help you keep this form up to date.

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