

# Medication Safety

## A Guide to the Safe Use of Your Medications



### Medication Safety

Medications are prescribed to help you manage your health and wellness. It is important that you are taking them correctly and safely. It is always a good idea to ask your health provider if you are unclear about your medications.

### Medication Interactions

Before starting new prescribed or over-the-counter medications, vitamin supplements, or herbal remedies, first check with your pharmacist, doctor, or nurse practitioner. When these products are combined with your prescription medications, this may cause a problem called a drug interaction, which can create negative side effects.

Drinking alcohol while on some medications can also have negative side effects. It can impact the way your medications work, or can make them ineffective. Many medications interact with alcohol, leading to increased risk of illness, injury, damage to organs and, in some cases, death. Using any illegal or street drugs while taking medication can also have similar side effects.

### Medication Disposal

Most pharmacies will dispose of old/unused medications. Keeping medications past their expiry date means they can be less effective and possibly dangerous, especially if they are not stored appropriately. Disposing of medications properly will help protect the environment, as well as pets, children, and anyone who might find medicines in your trash. Flushing them could mean medications are getting into our water supply.

### Remembering to Take Medications

It is important that you take your medications at the scheduled times, and that you are taking the right dose/amount.

Ways to help remember to take your medications regularly:

- Have it on a calendar
- Leave notes
- Set an alarm
- Schedule when refills are due
- Take at regular times such as when you are getting up, going to bed, or brushing your teeth
- Use a phone app reminder
- Leave medications in places where they become part of your daily routine

## Asking Questions

When being prescribed a medication, there are some questions you may want to ask:

- What is the medication for?
- How will it help me?
- How am I supposed to take it, and for how long?
- What are possible side effects? What should I do if they occur?
- Is this medication safe to take with other medications or dietary supplements?
- Should I avoid any food, drink, or activities while taking this medication?
- How should I store the medication?
- What should I do if I miss a dose?
- If you have a drug benefit plan, you might want to ask if the medication is covered.

## Calling Your Doctor

If there are any concerns with your medications, speak to your doctor, nurse practitioner, or pharmacist before you stop taking them. Stopping medications can make you sick and, depending on your medication, it can set back your treatment, increase suicidal thoughts, create resistance to infections, cause development of blood clots, or even lead to a heart attack. Your doctor or pharmacist can give you the best advice on what to do.

Call your doctor:

- If you are having side effects—there could be alternative medications, or the doctor could have suggestions to reduce or manage the side effects.
- If you think your medications aren't working correctly.
- If you find taking medications too difficult, explain this to your doctor—there could be alternative ways to take the medications (such as injections), or the doctor might have some tips to help you.

## Tips

- Don't ever share medications. Just because your medications work well for you doesn't mean that they work for everyone—someone else might have a very bad reaction.
- Check with the pharmacist before cutting, splitting, crushing, or opening a tablet or capsule. Some medications are designed to be taken whole, and splitting them may impact the drug effectiveness.
- Make a list of every medication you take, including over-the-counter medications and supplements. Keep the list with you at all times and show the list to your doctor, nurse practitioner, pharmacist, or other healthcare professional any time you receive health care.
- Keep medications in the labelled containers that they came in, so you will always know what medications they are.
- Individuals can have the pharmacy review their prescriptions, over-the-counter medications, vitamins, and supplements to help identify any possible concerns with their combined use.
- Make sure your doctor and pharmacist know of any allergies or adverse reactions to medications you have.
- If you are taking more than one medication, ask your pharmacy about blister packaging, which helps to organize pills and dose times.
- It is best to use only one pharmacy for medications, to reduce risk.