

Medication Safety

A Guide to the Safe Use of Your Medications

Medications are prescribed to help you manage your health and wellness. It is important that you are taking them correctly and safely. Ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist if you are unclear about your medications.

Medication Interactions

Consult with your prescriber or pharmacist before taking any over the counter medications, vitamins or herbal remedies as they may interact with prescribed medications.

Drinking alcohol or using non prescribed or street drugs while on some medications can also cause negative side effects. It can impact the way your medications work, or can make them ineffective.

Medication Disposal

If you have any out of date or unused medications take them to a pharmacy for disposal. Do not put them in the garbage or flush them down the toilet, as this creates a risk to other people, animals and the environment.

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 prescriber or pharmacist before you stop taking them. Your prescriber or pharmacist can give you the best advice on what to do.

Call your prescriber or pharmacist:

- If you are having side effects—there could be alternative medications, or ways 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 (or ask your pharmacist for 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.
- You can have the pharmacy review your 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.

