

Your Medicine: Play It Safe

Medicine and You

Have you ever had a problem with your medicines? You are not alone. There are many questions you may have, such as:



- When exactly should I take my medicine?
- Is it safe to take my vitamins when I am taking a prescription medicine?
- Now that I feel better, can I stop taking my medicine?

Let's face it, medicine is prescribed to help you, but it can hurt you if you take too much or mix medicines that don't go together.

Many people are harmed each year, some seriously, because of taking the wrong medicine or not taking the right medicines correctly.



Your Health Care Team

You can help get the best results by being a partner with your health care team. Your health care team includes:



- **Doctors, nurse practitioners, and other professionals** who prescribe your medicine for you.
- **Nurses** who help with your care at home, a doctor's office, or a hospital.
- **Pharmacists** who fill your prescription and are available to answer questions about your medicines.

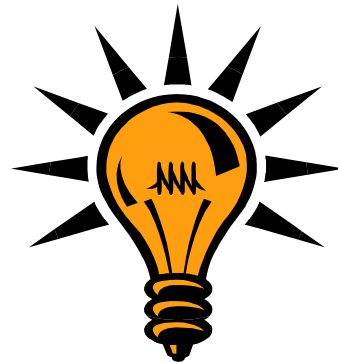


- Use the attached form to keep track of your doctors and pharmacy.

Four Ways To Play It Safe With Medicines

Let's look at four ways to safely manage your medicines:

1. **Give Your Health Care Team Important Information**
2. **Get the Facts About Your Medicine**
3. **Stay With Your Treatment Plan**
4. **Keep a Record of Your Medicines**



1. Give Your Health Care Team Important Information

Be a partner with your health care team. Tell them about:

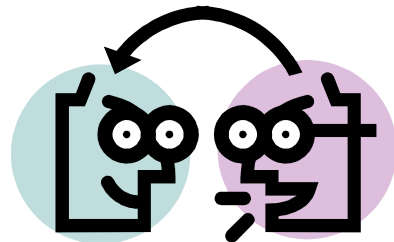
- All the medicines, vitamins, and dietary supplements you're taking, including:
 - **Prescription medicines.**
 - **Medicines you can buy without a prescription**, such as aspirin, antacids, laxatives, and cough medicine.
 - **Vitamins and dietary supplements**, such as St. John's Wort or ginkgo biloba.



- **Use the attached form to keep track of your medications and supplements.**

Also be sure to tell your health care team:

- If you have medicine allergies or if you have had problems when taking a medicine before.
- About any other doctors who have prescribed medicine for you or suggested that you take a vitamin or herbal supplement.
- About any other illness or medical condition you have, like diabetes or high blood pressure.
- If cost is a concern, there may be another medicine that costs less and will work the same.

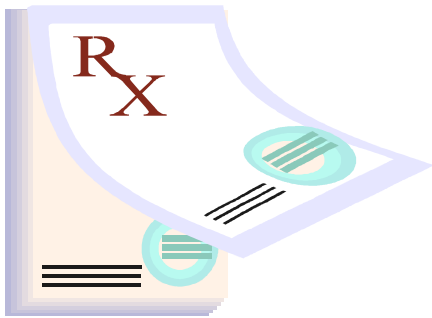


2. Get the Facts About Your Medicine

Be Informed

Ask questions about every new prescription medicine. Get the answers you need from your health care team before you take your medicine.

Read the Prescription



If your doctor writes your prescription by hand, make sure you can read it. If your doctor submits your prescription to the pharmacy electronically, ask for a copy of the prescription.

Know What Your Medicine Is For

Ask your doctor to write down on the prescription what the medicine is used for...not just "take once a day" but "take once a day for high blood pressure."

Ask Questions

If you have other questions or concerns:

- Talk to your doctor or pharmacist.
- Write questions down ahead of time and bring them to your appointment.



By taking the time to ask questions now, you may be preventing problems later.

Questions To Ask Before Taking Your Medicine



- Use the attached form to keep track of your questions regarding your medications.

Tips!

- **Write your questions down** ahead of time and take the list with you to your appointment.
- **Take notes** when you get information from your health care team.
- **Bring a friend or family member** with you when you visit the doctor. Talking things over with someone you trust can help you make better decisions.
- **Try to use the same pharmacy** to buy all of your medicines so your prescription records will all be in one place.
- **Read and save the patient information** that comes with your medicine. It's often stapled to the bag from the pharmacy.
- **Keep a list of all the medicines, vitamins, and dietary supplements you take.** Be sure to add new medicines to the list when you start taking something new or when you change your dose. Show the list to your doctor and pharmacist.



- Use the attached form to keep track of your medications and supplements.
- **Make a copy of your list.** Keep one copy and give the other to a friend or loved one.

3. Stay With Your Treatment Plan

Now that you have the right medicine, you'll want to carry out the treatment plan. But that's not always easy. The medicines may cause side effects. Or you may feel better and want to stop before finishing your medicines.



- **Take all the medications** you were prescribed. It is very important to take all of your medicine for as many days as your doctor prescribed, even if you feel better.
- **Ask your doctor if your prescription needs to be refilled.** If you are taking medicine for high blood pressure or to lower your cholesterol, you may be using your medicine for a long time.
- If you are having **side effects** or other concerns, tell your doctor. You may be able to take a different amount or type of medicine.
- Your medicine was prescribed only for you. **Never give your prescription medicine to somebody else** or take prescription medicine that wasn't prescribed for you.
- Ask whether you need blood tests, x-rays, or other **lab tests** to find out if the medicine is working, to find out if it's causing any problems, and to see if you need a different medicine. Ask your doctor to tell you what the tests showed.



Tips!

You can get help:

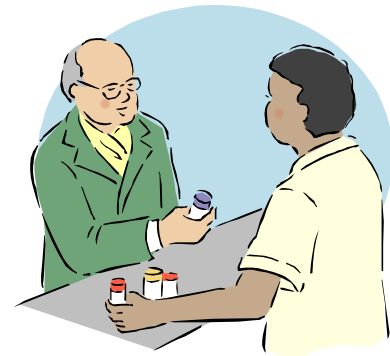
- At work, there may be a nurse on site.
- At school, a school nurse may be able to help your child take medicines on time and safely.
- At home, a visiting nurse may be able to help you.



Friends and Family

Friends and family can help by:

- Going with you to the doctor. Ask them to take notes about your medicines and other parts of your treatment plan.
- Picking up your medicine at the pharmacy. Have them show the pharmacist your list of medicines, vitamins, and supplements. They should ask, "Will this new medicine work safely with the other medicines?"



- Calling regularly to remind you to take your medicine on time. If you are having any problems, let them know.
- Keeping a record of what medicine you take so you won't take it twice.

4. Keep a Record of Your Medicines

Keeping a detailed record of your medications is important to help you and your health care team be sure you receive the best treatment possible.



- Use the attached form to keep track of your medications, vitamins and other dietary supplements.

The information contained in this handout is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to be used as a replacement for discussion with your health care provider. Speak with your doctor for any specific medical concerns. Always check with your doctor before making any changes with your medication therapy or lifestyle.

Source: *Your Medicine: Play It Safe*. Patient Guide. AHRQ Publication No. 03-0019, February 2003. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, Rockville, MD, and the National Council on Patient Information and Education, Bethesda, MD.
<http://www.ahrq.gov/consumer/safemeds/safemeds.htm> (accessed August 2, 2006)
