

Using Medicines Safely

Medicines can keep you healthy, but it is important to use them correctly and carefully. If you do not take your medicines as told by your health care provider, you can harm your health. This applies not only to prescription medicines but also to over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, supplements, and herbal remedies.

- Take over-the-counter and prescription medicines only as told by your health care provider.
- At each appointment, talk to your health care provider about all of the medicines you take.

Things you must know about your medicine

Make sure you know:

- Basic information about your medicine, such as:
 - The name. This includes all brand names and generic names.
 - Why you are taking it.
 - How much you can take.
 - How often you can take it.
- How to take your medicine, including:
 - If you need to take it before, with, or after meals.
 - What foods you should avoid.
 - If you need to avoid alcohol.
 - What to do if you miss a dose.
 - If it interacts with any other medicines.
- Possible side effects and what to do if you have any. This includes:
 - Signs of an allergic reaction.
 - When to call your health care provider.

Ask your health care provider or pharmacist:

- How long it will take for your medicine to start working.
- If you will need refills or not.
- If you can take a generic version instead of the brand name.
- If you can take the medicine if you are pregnant or breastfeeding.
- About other options to treat your condition instead of medicine.

What actions can I take to use medicines carefully?

Things to avoid

- **Do not** share your medicine with anyone else.
- **Do not** take anyone else's medicine.
- **Do not** split, mash, or chew your medicine unless your health care provider or pharmacist says you can. Tell your health care provider if you are having problems swallowing your medicine.
- **Do not** take medicine in the dark. Make sure you can see which medicines you are taking.
- **Do not** stop taking your medicines without first contacting your health care provider.

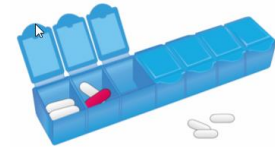
Things to do at the pharmacy

- Let your pharmacist know if the information on the label has changed, or if the size, shape, or color of the medicine looks different.
- Make sure you can read the label and open your medicine container. If you have problems, tell your pharmacist.



Tracking your medicine use

- Track how you use your medicine by writing down when you take it. Download a tracking worksheet at this website: www.nia.nih.gov/health/tracking-your-medications-worksheet
- Use the same pharmacy as much as possible. They will know you and your medicine history.
- Organize your medicines. If you use a pill box, keep the original medicine container and information. You may want to keep a file for medicine information.
- Set an alarm to make sure you take your medicines on time. Try using one on your mobile device or smartphone.
- Give a copy of your medicine information to a trusted friend or family member.
- Track your refill dates and expiration dates. Try using one on your mobile device or smartphone.



Storing your medicine

- Store your medicines in a cool, dry, and dark place. **Do not** store medicine in your bathroom because they are often moist and humid.
- Keep medicines out of reach of children and pets.

When traveling

- Bring all your medicine information and contact numbers.
- Refill your prescription medicines before you leave, if needed.
- If you are traveling by plane, keep your medicines in your carry-on bag.
- Bring extra medicine with you in case your travel plans change.

General tips

- Before you take your medicine, read labels and instructions carefully.
- Throw away old or unused medicines safely. To learn more, go to www.fda.gov and search "safe disposal of medicine."

What can happen if these actions are not taken?

- You may be at greater risk for side effects and harm from your medicine.
- Your medicine may not work as it is supposed to.
- Your condition may not get better or it may get worse.
- You may have complications from your condition.
- Your medicine may react with other medicines you take.
- You may have additional medical expenses if you experience side effects or take longer to get better.
- Other people may be harmed if they take your medicine.
- You could become dependent and suffer withdrawal symptoms if you do not take prescription pain medicine as told by your health care provider.

Where to find more information

U.S. Food and Drug Administration, Use Medicines Wisely: <https://www.fda.gov>

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Use Medicines Safely: <https://healthfinder.gov>

Choosing Wisely, Taking Medicines Safely: <http://www.choosingwisely.org>

Contact a health care provider if:

- You have questions about your medicine.
- You are ill and not able to take your medicine.
- You have side effects from your medicine.
- You miss a dose or doses of your medicine.

Get help right away if:

- You have symptoms of an allergic reaction to your medicine.
- You think that you or someone else may have taken too much medicine (*overdose*). The hotline of the National Poison Control Center is (800) 222-1222.

Medication allergy or overdose is an emergency. Do not wait to see if the symptoms will go away. Get medical help right away. Call your local emergency services (911 in the U.S.). Do not drive yourself to the hospital.

Summary

- Taking medicines is sometimes necessary to keep you healthy, but it is important to use them correctly and carefully.
- Read medicine labels and instructions carefully.
- Talk to your health care provider about all the medicines you are taking.
- If you do not use your medicine correctly, you may be at higher risk for side effects and other dangerous health problems. Your medicine may not work as planned, or your condition may not improve or get worse.
- Contact your health care provider if you have questions about your medicines, or if you experience any side effects.

This information is not intended to replace advice given to you by your health care provider. Make sure you discuss any questions you have with your health care provider.