



...About Proper Medicine Use

General Information about the Use of Medicines

Taking even the simplest of medicines may be more complicated than you think. For instance, some medicines should be taken with meals, others between meals. Some may make you drowsy, while others keep you awake. Alcohol or caffeine, other medicines, certain foods, or smoking also may affect the way your medicine works. And some medicines have side effects that are barely noticeable or mildly bothersome; other side effects may require medical attention.

Most people need to take medicine at some time in their lives, be it over-the-counter (nonprescription) medicine or medicine prescribed by a doctor, dentist, nurse, or other health care provider. Regardless of how often you take medicines, information about their use enables you to gain the full benefit of the medicine you take. This information applies generally to both over-the-counter and prescription medicines. But if you are taking a particular medicine, be sure to ask your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist for specific information about it.

What you need to know...

...BEFORE USING YOUR MEDICINE

Before you use any medicine, your doctor, nurse, and pharmacist should be told:

- if you have ever had an allergic or unusual reaction to any medicine, food, or other substance, such as yellow dye or sulfites.
- if you are on a low-salt, low-sugar, low-cholesterol/fat, or any other special diet. Most medicines contain more than their active ingredient and may contain something that would conflict with your dietary restrictions and possibly make you sick.
- if you are pregnant or plan to become pregnant. Certain medicines may cause birth defects or other problems in the unborn child. For some medicines, safe use during pregnancy has not been established.
- if you are breast-feeding. Some medicines may pass into the breast milk and cause unwanted effects in the baby.
- if you have any medical problems other than the one(s) for which you are taking the medicine.
- if you are now taking or have taken any medicines in recent weeks, including all over-the-counter drugs, dietary supplements, pain relievers, laxatives, or antacids.

- if you have difficulty remembering things or reading labels.

...WHEN TAKING YOUR MEDICINE

Following these tips when taking medicines will help assure that they work as well and as quickly as possible.

- Take medicines exactly as directed. This includes taking the medicine at the right time and for the full length of time as directed by your health care professional
- If you are using an over-the-counter (nonprescription) medicine, follow the directions on the label, unless otherwise directed by your health care professional.
- If you miss doses or make other dosing mistakes, call your doctor or pharmacist for advice.
- If your medicine does not seem to be working or you experience side effects, check with your health care professional.
- To avoid mistakes, do not take medicine in the dark. Always read the label before you take the medicine and know the expiration date, if any, of the contents.
- Tell the pharmacist if child-proof caps are too difficult for you to open. Remember these caps are required by law and should be used if you have children who live with or visit you.



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- Never mix different medicines in one container. Keep your medicine tightly capped in its original container when not in use.
- Do not remove the label. It has directions and other important information on it.

...WHEN STORING YOUR MEDICINES

BE SURE TO:

- keep them out of children's reach.
- keep liquid medicines from freezing.
- keep them in their original containers.
- store them away from heat and direct light.

BE SURE NOT TO:

- store capsules or tablets in the bathroom medicine cabinet. Heat or moisture may cause the medicine to break down, that is, change its chemical makeup and lose its ability to work properly.
- leave the cotton plug in a medicine container that has been opened; the cotton may draw moisture into the container.
- store medicines in the refrigerator unless directed to do so.
- leave your medicines in an automobile for long periods of time. Heat and sunlight can damage the medicine or change its properties.

- keep outdated medicine. Be sure any discarded medicine is out of the reach of children.

What special precautions should you take when using medicines?

- Never give your medicine to anyone else. It has been prescribed for your personal medical problem and may not be the right treatment or may be harmful for someone else.
- Do not take medicines that don't seem quite right (for example, cloudy liquids that usually are clear). If you have any questions, talk to your pharmacist.
- Before having any kind of surgery (including dental surgery) or emergency treatment, tell the physician, nurse, or dentist about any medicine you are taking.
- If you think you have taken an overdose of any medicine or if a child has taken a medicine by accident, call your poison control center (1-800-222-1222) or your health care provider at once. Keep emergency telephone numbers handy.

What should you do about side effects?

Some medicines may cause unwanted conditions or symptoms. These are called side effects. Some side effects may need medical attention, while

others may not. It is important to know what side effects may occur and what you should do if you notice signs of them. If you notice any unexpected reactions or side effects, check with your doctor, pharmacist, or nurse.

WHAT ELSE SHOULD YOU KNOW?

- It is a good idea to learn both the generic name (what the drug itself is called) and brand name (the name the manufacturer gives its version of the drug) of your medicine and to write these names down and keep them for future use.
- Many prescriptions may not be refilled unless your pharmacist has checked with your doctor first. To save time, do not wait until you have run out of your medicine before requesting a refill. This is especially important if you must take your medicine each day.
- For specific information about your medicines, talk to your doctor, pharmacist, or nurse. Don't be embarrassed to ask questions. If you don't understand something you are told, ask for an explanation. If it will help you remember what they tell you, write down the information.
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