

# Quick Information for Your Health

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES • FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION

## Use Medicine Safely



When you don't feel well, medicines can help you get better. But they can hurt you if you don't take them according to instructions from your doctor or pharmacist. Before using any medicine, read the label!

There are two kinds of medicine:

**Over-the-Counter (OTC) Medicine**—Medicine you can buy without a doctor's prescription.

**Prescription Medicine**—Your doctor writes a prescription that tells the pharmacist what you need. You pick up the medicine at a pharmacy.

Your doctor or pharmacist can help you take medicine safely.

Medicine labels may be hard to read. Make sure you ask questions so you know how and when to take the medicine.

Taking more than one medicine without telling the doctor might hurt you.

When you talk to your doctor and pharmacist:

- tell them which medicines you are taking now
- tell them if you have ever had problems with medicine
- make a list of your medicines to show them, or bring your medicine with you
- tell them if you are allergic to any foods or medicines.

Protect yourself and your baby. Medicine may hurt your baby. Tell the doctor or pharmacist if:

- You are pregnant.
- You are nursing a baby.

Before you take any kind of medicine, make sure you know:

- What it is.
- Why you should take it.
- If it could make you feel sleepy or cause some other problem for you.
- When to take it.
- How much to take.
- How long to take it.

You also need to know what you should not have while taking your medicine. Some foods and drinks can make medicine work too fast. Some can make it work too slow or not at all. Smoking cigarettes can change



the way your medicines work. And drinking alcohol when you are taking some medicines can be very dangerous.



Some medicines may cause problems if you take them with other medicines. This is why it's important to tell your doctor and pharmacist about all the medicines you are taking. And some medicines can cause problems, even if you take them correctly. Call your doctor or pharmacist if you think your medicine is making you feel worse.

### **Three Safety Ideas**

1. When you buy medicine, make sure no one has already opened it. At the store, check to see if the package was opened. If it was, tell a person working in the store.
2. Never take someone else's prescription medicine.
3. Keep all medicines away from children. A locked cabinet is best.

Do you have questions about your medicine? The FDA (Food and Drug Administration) may have an office near you. Look for their number in the blue pages of the phone book. Or check online at [www.fda.gov/cder/](http://www.fda.gov/cder/)

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The Food and Drug Administration is an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that makes sure that medicines for diabetes and other illnesses work and are safe.

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