



# Senior Series

The Ohio  
Department of  
Aging



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## Working With Health Care Professionals To Take Medications Safely

### The "Prescription Triangle"

A "prescription triangle" consists of you, your doctor, and your pharmacist. To ensure you use your medications safely, there must be good communication within this "prescription triangle."

**Patient.** The patient is the most important person in the triangle and has the responsibility of taking medications. The patient also needs to choose a physician and a pharmacist carefully and build a trusting relationship with both.

**Health care professionals.** The doctor and pharmacist have the responsibility of ensuring medications are safe and effective. They can also help patients to understand their medication treatment and to take their medication safely.

### What Responsibility Do You Have as a Patient to Ensure the Safe and Effective Use of Medications?

- Share accurate information about the medication(s) you are taking.

- Ask a lot of questions.
- Share your medical history with both your doctor and pharmacist.
- Talk to your pharmacist when combining prescription and over-the-counter medications.
- Design a plan for taking your medications (See fact sheets #SS-128 and #SS-135).
- Take medications exactly as directed.
- Report unpleasant side effects to your pharmacist or physician.

### Get All the Facts

An effective weapon against medication mistakes is having knowledge about every medication you take.

Get *all* the facts. Before taking any medication you should know:

1. **The name of the medication.** Write down the name as well as the dosage you are taking.
2. **The purpose of the medication.** What is this medication intended to treat?

3. **How and when to take the medication.**

- Find out how often to take the medication
- Under what circumstances should the medication be taken? (i.e., with food or without? at bed time?)

4. **How long to take medication.** Many medications need to be continued for several days even though you may feel better. Stopping a medication too soon may prevent the medication from doing its work completely and cause a relapse of the original problem.

5. **What to expect.** Know what results to expect from the medication you take and what to do if these results do not occur. While some medications act quickly, others may take 2 to 4 weeks or longer to be effective.

6. **Possible side effects.** Any medication can have side effects. Side effects may be mild (e.g., change in the color of urine) or serious (e.g., dizziness, sexual dysfunction, depression). Find out what side effects are associated with the medication you are taking. Ask your doctor:

- What should you do if side effects or unexpected reactions occur?

- When should you call the doctor about side effects?

7. **What to avoid.** Ask about any precautions you should observe while taking a medication. Some questions to ask:

- What foods, beverages, or other medications, if any, should I avoid while taking this medication?
- Should I avoid drinking alcohol while taking this medication?
- Should I avoid certain activities while on this medication? (i.e., driving a vehicle, operating machinery, or being out in the sun).

Don't be afraid to ask your doctor or pharmacist questions. No question is a "dumb" question when it concerns your health. It is important to be well informed about any medication you take so you will not make any mistakes. Remember, it is your responsibility to make sure you get the information you need to take your medication properly.

## Reference

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