



Senior Series

A partnership between Ohio State University Extension
and Ohio Aging Network professionals



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Systems to Keep Track of Taking Medications

To get the most benefit and to reduce risks, you must take medications as directed. Organizing your medications can be hard, especially if you take several medications each day, at different times, and with different instructions. Two common concerns when managing medication include:

1. ***Keeping track of more than one medicine.***
2. ***Remembering whether or not a medication has been taken.***

An organized system for taking medications can make medicine management easier and help to guarantee you are taking your medications as directed. Keep in mind

any limitations you may have (e.g., vision, memory, or mobility) when creating a system. It is important to develop a system that works *for you*.

Medication Chart

A medication chart is a written record of all the medications you take, how you take them, when you take them, and who wrote them for you. This should be kept in a place where it is easy to read and refer to, such as the bathroom or kitchen. This is a good record to have regardless of whether you need medication reminders or not.

- Use a good-sized sheet of paper.
- Draw five columns and label the top of each column with the

following:

1. **Medication name and what the medication is used for**
 2. **Color and shape**
 3. **Strength** (How much do you take?)
 4. **Directions** (How should the medication be taken?)
 5. **Times** (When should the medication be taken?)
 6. **Pharmacy source** (Where do you get the medication—local pharmacy, mail-in pharmacy, or other?)
- Complete this information for each medication you take.
 - Include all over-the-counter medications you are taking.
 - Include any allergies to medicines.

Medication Check-off Chart

A medication check-off chart can be used to remind you to take medications and/or remind you whether a medication has been taken. This chart can be kept near where medications are stored or can be carried with you.

- Use an oversized index card or a larger sheet of paper to record information about your medicines.
- List the names and directions for each medication you are taking down the left side of the card.

- Draw seven columns and put the day of the week at the top of each column.
- Write down times when each medication is to be taken (e.g., a.m., lunch, p.m., bedtime).
- At the time you take each medication cross off that section on the chart.
- Make photocopies of the chart so you have a new one to use each week.

Color-Coded Chart

A color-coded chart can be used in combination with a medication chart or check-off chart. It can be particularly useful for people who have trouble reading the print on prescription labels.

- Use colored self-adhesive labels or colored markers to code the labels of the medication containers.
- Use colors that are distinctly different from one another. For example, it can be difficult to tell the difference between red and orange, or between dark blue and black.
- Make sure you can see the colors clearly.
- Put a color mark by the name of the medication on your chart that matches the color mark on the label of that medication's container.

- Be sure to mark the medication containers, NOT the caps, because sometimes caps are returned to the wrong containers. Also, be sure to keep medications in their original containers.
- When refilling a prescription, be sure to give the new medication container its proper color code.
- Some medication stores will also color code the bottle to tell whose medicines are whose if more than one person is using medicines in the same house.
- Check with your doctor or pharmacist first before using any container system that exposes the medication to light, air, or moisture. You need to know if any of your medications will lose their strength if left out in the open for a few hours.
- Label each compartments with the hours of the day, for example one dish is 8 a.m., one is 12 p.m.
- Put the pills into the appropriate compartment each morning.
- Take pills that are in the 8 a.m. compartment at that time, 12 p.m., and so on.
- Do not use egg cartons because of possible traces of bacteria.

Medication Calendar

Calendars can be helpful in remembering to take medications. If you take medication only once a day, consider using a daily tear-off calendar. You tear off the dated page after the medication is taken. When multiple medications are taken, a large calendar with large squares may be helpful. You mark on each day which medication should be taken and when. Each time you take a medication, you place a check in the square.

Container Systems

A daily container system might be helpful if you take the same dosage of medications every day. It works best if you take the same pills every day and if pills look different.

Pill Boxes

Pill boxes are sold at your local pharmacy. These boxes are designed for one or more medicines, lasting for a day, or longer. You can fill the container all at once and then take your medications at the specified times. When purchasing pill boxes, be sure that each compartment is large enough for fingers to easily get the medications and can fit multiple pills.

Tracking medication is only one part of this record system. It is important to keep track of all health conditions, medications, financial information, and other items related to health.

Any system that aids you in taking your medications as instructed is helpful. A medication system only works if you use it carefully!

Reference

Senior Series Volume 2, The Center on Rural Elderly, University of Missouri System.

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Revised by Dr. Bella Mehta, PharmD (August 2007).

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