

Taking Your Medicine



What You Need to Know

This brochure can help you learn more about taking medicine effectively. It doesn't replace regular medical checkups or advice from your health care team. If you need help, talk with your doctor about taking your medicine as prescribed.



**Getting Healthier
Together**

What is Medication Adherence?

Medication adherence means **taking your medicines** as prescribed by your doctor or other health care professional.¹

This includes taking your medicine:

- ▶ In the right amount (dose)
- ▶ At the right time
- ▶ In the right way



Taking your medicine as prescribed is important to¹:



- ▶ Help keep chronic conditions, such as diabetes or high blood pressure, under control
- ▶ Treat an illness or injury
- ▶ Improve or maintain overall health and well-being

A few facts about medicines

- ▶ About **20% to 30%** of new prescriptions are **never filled** at the pharmacy¹
- ▶ Between **30% and 50%** of those who take medicine for a chronic condition, such as diabetes or high blood pressure, **don't take it correctly**²
- ▶ About **125,000** Americans die each year from **not taking medicine as prescribed**²

What Are Medicines?

Medicines are also referred to as *drugs*. They can be:

Prescription medicines³

These are medicines you can only get with an order from a health care professional such as a doctor or nurse practitioner. Examples are blood pressure pills or an asthma inhaler.

- ▶ Prescription medicines can be generic or a brand name
- ▶ Generic and brand-name medicines have the same active ingredients and act the same way in the body

Over-the-counter medicines³

Over-the-counter or OTC medicines are the types of medicines you can buy without a prescription. They can come in tablets, capsules, liquids, creams, or many other dosage forms. Examples are aspirin, antacids, and cough syrup.

Dietary supplements⁴

Dietary supplements are products that contain a dietary ingredient which includes vitamins, minerals, herbs or botanicals, and other substances that can be used to supplement the diet. They can come in many forms, including tablets, capsules, powders, energy bars, and liquids.

- ▶ Dietary supplements are not intended to treat, diagnose, cure, or relieve symptoms of disease

Talk with your doctor or other health care professional before taking any new medicine, including over-the-counter medicines and dietary supplements. Some medicines may cause serious problems especially when mixed with another one. Many OTC medicines and dietary supplements can have strong effects and may not be safe for you to take.



It's also important to make sure your doctor knows about all the medicines you take. This includes³:

- ▶ Medicines prescribed by other doctors
- ▶ Dietary supplements, including vitamins, minerals, and herbal products
- ▶ OTC medicines you take every now and then

Questions to Ask About Your Medicines



When you get a new prescription or start a new OTC medicine or dietary supplement, **learn what you can about it.** This can help you understand why it's important to take your medicine as prescribed.

Here are some questions to ask your doctor or pharmacist³

- ▶ What's the name of the medicine?
- ▶ Why do I need the medicine?
- ▶ How many times a day should I take the medicine?
- ▶ How much medicine should I take?
- ▶ What do I do if I miss a dose?
- ▶ Should I take the medicine with food or without food?
- ▶ Are there foods or drinks I should avoid when taking this medicine?
- ▶ What does "take as needed" mean?
- ▶ How long will it take for the medicine to work?
- ▶ Will the medicine cause problems with other medicines I take?
- ▶ Is it safe for me to drive while taking this medicine?
- ▶ How should I store the medicine?
- ▶ What are the possible side effects?
- ▶ What should I do if I have a problem with the medicine?
- ▶ When can I stop taking this medicine?
- ▶ Will I need to refill the medicine?



Tips to Help You Take Your Medicines

Make a list³

Make a list of all your medicines. Include prescription medicines, OTC medicines, and dietary supplements. Write down the:



- ▶ Name of each medicine
- ▶ Amount you take (dose)
- ▶ Time(s) you take it
- ▶ Doctor who prescribed it
- ▶ Reason it was prescribed

Keep a copy of your list with you, so you can show it to your doctor and other health care professionals during visits. Also, let family or a friend know what medicines you are taking.

Use one pharmacy³

Get your prescriptions filled at the same pharmacy. That way, your records are in one place. This can also alert your pharmacist if a new medicine might cause a problem with another medicine you are taking.



Can't use just one pharmacy? Show your medicine list to the pharmacist at each pharmacy.

When you travel³

- ▶ Remember to take your medicines with you.
- ▶ Always keep your medicine in your carry-on bag in case your luggage gets lost.
- ▶ Be sure to pack a few extra days' worth of medicine in case of a travel delay.
- ▶ Carry a list of all medicines you take with you.



Use daily reminders¹

- ▶ Use a 7-day pill box or container to organize your medicines each week. If you take medicine more than once a day, get a pill box with sections for multiple doses.
- ▶ Set an alarm on your clock or cell phone to remind you it's time to take your medicine.
- ▶ Take your medicine at the same time each day.
- ▶ Tie taking your medicine with a daily routine like brushing your teeth or getting ready for bed.



- ▶ Use a timer or calendar to remind you when to refill your medicine before it runs out.

Safety tips for taking medicines³

- ▶ Keep all medicines where children can't reach or see them.
- ▶ Never share your medicine with anyone.
- ▶ Never take medicines prescribed for another person.
- ▶ Don't stop taking your medicines without telling your doctor.
- ▶ Contact your doctor or pharmacist if you think you're experiencing side effects.



Pharmacy Programs and Services



Many pharmacies offer programs and services to help you manage your medicines. **Ask your pharmacist** if any of these services are available to you.

Refill Reminders

Many pharmacies have a **refill reminder service**. As part of this service, the pharmacy will^{5,6}:

- ▶ Let you know when your prescription is due to be refilled or refill your prescription automatically before it runs out
- ▶ Let you know when your medicines are ready to be picked up
- ▶ Contact your doctor to help get your prescriptions renewed

How this can help you:

- ▶ **Avoid missed doses**—you're less likely to run out of medicine
- ▶ **Receive refill notices however you prefer**—by phone, text, or email

Aligned Refills

Some pharmacies can also **align your refills** so you can pick them up at the same time each month. This is called **medication synchronization** or "**med sync**."⁷ How does this work?

- ▶ Your pharmacy will review your monthly medicines and create a plan to align your refills so you can pick them up on a single day each month that's convenient for you.
- ▶ Your pharmacy may call you before your pick-up day to talk about any changes to your medicines. This allows the pharmacy to take care of potential issues before you arrive.
- ▶ On your scheduled pick-up day, all your medicines will be ready. You can also use this time to ask the pharmacist any questions you may have.

How this can help you:

- ▶ **Increased convenience**—fewer trips to the pharmacy
- ▶ **Easy to get your medicines on time**—without calling the pharmacy for refills
- ▶ **Get your questions answered**—an opportunity to meet with your pharmacist on a monthly basis to talk about your medicines

Understanding Prescription Medicine Labels



When you know how to read medicine labels, it's easier to take your medicine correctly and get it filled on time. The label also gives you contact information if you have questions about the medicine.



Prescription labels⁸

Pharmacy XYZ
100 Main Street, Hometown, NY
DEA# BD123456789 800-555-5555

DR. J. JONES

Rx: **123456**

DOE, JANE
123 ANYWHERE STREET
HOMETOWN, NY 10000

TAKE 1 TABLET BY MOUTH EVERY DAY

ENTERIC ASPIRIN 81 MG QTY: 100

REFILLS: 2

Rx Written: 9/7/20 Rx Filled: 9/8/20

DISCARD AFTER 09/7/22

CAUTION: FEDERAL LAW PROHIBITS THE TRANSFER OF THIS DRUG TO ANY PERSON OTHER THAN THE PATIENT FOR WHOM IT WAS PRESCRIBED

TAKE WITH FOOD

Pharmacy phone number

Prescribing doctor

Your name and address

Strength—the amount of medicine in each pill

How many pills are in the container

Date prescription was filled

Medicine cannot be used after this date—always discard expired prescriptions properly

Name and address of the pharmacy

Prescription (Rx) number

How and when to take the medicine

Brand name and generic name

How many refills there are for this prescription

Date prescription was written

Special instructions or things to avoid

This is a **sample label**—all prescription labels have the same information on them, but the format may be different than shown in this example.

Over-the-counter labels⁹

OTC medicines in the United States have a Drug Facts label that includes:

- ▶ **Active ingredient:** the medicine in the product and the amount in each unit
- ▶ **Purpose:** the action or category, such as antacid or cough suppressant
- ▶ **Uses:** symptoms or diseases the product can treat or prevent
- ▶ **Warnings:** when to avoid or stop taking the product; possible side effects or interactions with other drugs or diseases
- ▶ **Directions:** how much to take, how to take it, how often and long to take it; specific age categories
- ▶ **Other information:** such as how to store the medicine
- ▶ **Inactive ingredients:** such as colors or flavors

Overcoming Issues that May Keep You from Taking Your Medicines



Here are some things you can try if you're having trouble taking your medicines as prescribed. For more help, talk with your doctor or pharmacist.

If you have trouble taking your medicines because...	Then try this...
You can't swallow pills or easily open the containers³	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Talk to your pharmacist about different forms of the medicine that may be available for you.▶ The pharmacy can give you containers that are easier to open and keep all medicines out of children's reach and sight.
You don't feel sick or dislike taking medicine⁵	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Learn more about your medical condition. It will help you understand why you need your medicines.▶ Keep in mind that some conditions may not have signs or symptoms.▶ Even if you don't feel sick, take your medicine unless your doctor has instructed you to stop.
You are too busy, or you forget¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Use pill boxes, calendars, magnets, or sticky notes to help remind you.▶ Tie your medicine schedule to daily routines, such as brushing your teeth, eating breakfast, or getting ready for bed.
You cannot afford it¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Talk to your doctor about lower cost options, such as a generic medicine.▶ Ask your pharmacist about assistance programs to help pay for your medicines.
You are worried about side effects¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Contact your doctor or pharmacist if side effects are bothering you. These may or may not be from the medicine you are taking. Your doctor or pharmacist will help you determine if it's a side effect.▶ Your doctor may be able to adjust how and when you take your medicine or even switch you to a different medicine.
You are concerned about becoming dependent¹⁰	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Talk with your doctor about your concerns.▶ Never take more medicine than prescribed for you.▶ Ask your doctor about ways to manage your condition that don't involve a medicine that can be misused or abused.

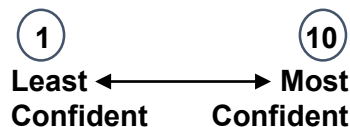
Action Plan



A personal plan for taking your medicine

Step 1: Please check the box for each action below that you want to take. Note that not all actions listed may apply to your personal situation.

Step 2: Select how confident you feel that you can take each action you choose. Circle a number from 1 to 10. A confidence level of 10 is the most confident and a 1 is the least confident.



Things to know before starting a new medicine	
<input type="checkbox"/> The name of the medicine and why I need it.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
<input type="checkbox"/> How and when I should take it.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
<input type="checkbox"/> What to do if I miss a dose.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
<input type="checkbox"/> What the possible side effects are.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
<input type="checkbox"/> When I can stop taking this medicine.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
<input type="checkbox"/> Will the medicine cause problems with other medicines I take.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Taking medicine as prescribed	
<input type="checkbox"/> Use one pharmacy for all my medicines.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
<input type="checkbox"/> Understand how to read prescription medicine labels correctly.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
<input type="checkbox"/> Refill my prescription before it runs out.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
<input type="checkbox"/> Take my medicine at the same time each day so it's part of my routine.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Problems taking my medicine	
<input type="checkbox"/> Tell my pharmacist if I have trouble swallowing pills.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
<input type="checkbox"/> Tell my pharmacist if I cannot open the medicine container.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
<input type="checkbox"/> Use reminders, such as a pill box, to organize my medicines and remind me to take them.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
<input type="checkbox"/> Let my doctor or pharmacist know if I think I'm experiencing side effects.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
<input type="checkbox"/> Let my doctor or pharmacist know if I cannot afford my medicine.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Step 3: Think about which action you'll begin first. Write down a specific step you'll take to start. For example, if you choose "Use a pill box to organize my medicines," your goal might be: Buy a pill container and fill it with a week's worth of my medicines.

Step 4: Please write the day and time that you will take this first step.

For example, Saturday at 2:00 PM.

Taking Your Medicine: What You Need to Know



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This includes taking your medicine:

- ▶ In the right amount (dose)
- ▶ At the right time
- ▶ In the right way

Questions to ask about my medicines

- ▶ What is the name of the medicine and why do I need it?
- ▶ How and when I should take it?
- ▶ What to do if I miss a dose?
- ▶ What are the possible side effects?
- ▶ How long will it take for the medicine to work?
- ▶ When can I stop taking this medicine?
- ▶ What should I do if I have a problem with it?

Tips to help you take your medicines

- ▶ Make a list of all the medicines you take.
- ▶ Get all your medicines at the same pharmacy.
- ▶ Refill your prescriptions before they run out.
- ▶ Use daily reminders, such as putting your medicine in a pill box or setting an alarm.
- ▶ When you travel, remember to take your medicines with you and keep them in your carry-on bag.
- ▶ Ask about reminder services or a “med sync” program that may be available to you.

Understanding prescription medicine labels

When you know how to read your medicine label, it's easier to take the medicine correctly. The label also provides contact information for questions about the medicine.

Overcoming issues with taking medicines

If you can't swallow pills or easily open containers:

- ▶ Ask your pharmacist if different forms of the medicine are available for you.
- ▶ The pharmacy can give you containers that are easier to open.

If you don't feel sick:

- ▶ Learn more about your medical condition.
- ▶ Keep in mind that you may not have signs or symptoms.

If you're too busy or you forget:

- ▶ Use pill boxes, calendars, magnets, or sticky notes to help remind you.
- ▶ Tie your medicine schedule to your daily routine, such as brushing your teeth.

If you can't afford the medicine:

- ▶ Talk to your doctor about lower cost options and ask your pharmacist about assistance programs.

If you're worried about side effects:

- ▶ Contact your doctor or pharmacist if you think you experience side effects.
- ▶ Your doctor may be able to adjust your medicine or switch you to a different one.

If you're concerned about becoming dependent, let your doctor know.



Safety Tips

- Never share your prescription medicine with anyone
- Never take medicines prescribed for another person
- Don't stop taking your medicines without telling your doctor

References

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