

Taking your medicines

Many people take medication as part of their daily routine to treat disease and improve health.¹ For medicines to be effective, it is important to take them exactly as directed.

The more you know about your medicines, the easier it can be to avoid problems.¹ The steps below may help.

Step 1: Get to know your medicines

For each medication you take, find out its name, why it's been prescribed, how it works, how to take it and any potential side effects you need to be aware of.

Ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist:

- How much should I take and how many times per day?
- What time of day should I take the medication?
- How long do I need to take it? When should I stop taking it?
- Do I need to take it with food and water?
- Is there anything I should avoid while taking this medication (e.g., other medicines, foods or beverages)?

You can also ask for an annual medication review. This is an opportunity for you, your healthcare provider and/or pharmacist to discuss all of the medicines you're taking.

Step 2: Understand side effects

A side effect is an unexpected or unwanted symptom or feeling you experience when taking a medicine. Some side effects are minor inconveniences that resolve on their own but some can be serious. Remember, all medications have possible side effects; however, not everyone who takes a medication will encounter them.

Before you take a new medication, learn as much as you can about potential side effects from your healthcare provider and/or pharmacist by asking these questions:

- What are the potential side effects? What should I do if side effects occur?
- When should I expect them to start?
- When and how should I report them?
- What steps can I take to prevent or manage them?

Do not stop taking or change the dose of a medication without talking to your healthcare team. Instead, ask your provider if they can recommend a different medicine with fewer or less severe side effects, or if there are any ways to lessen the symptoms you're experiencing.

Questions for my doctor

Step 3: Remember to take your medicines

It can be difficult to remember to take your medication each day, especially if you are on multiple types of medicines and/or taking them several times each day. Here are some helpful tips for remembering to take your medicines:

- **Make it routine.** Try to take your medicines before, during or after activities like eating lunch or getting ready for bed.
- **Keep your medicine in a safe but visible location.** Keep your medicines in an easy-to-see spot (but away from children and pets) so that you're sure to see them at the correct times.
- **Use a pillbox or reminder system.** Pillboxes can be purchased from a local drug store or pharmacy and can easily help you keep track of whether you've taken your medication. A daily alarm or a well-placed sticky note may also be useful for alerting you that it's time to take your medicine.
- **Ask for help.** You may find it helpful to recruit a friend or family member to keep you accountable. If you're feeling overwhelmed by your current medication regimen, ask your healthcare team if it is possible to simplify it.
- **Use an app on your smartphone or tablet.** There are several medication reminder apps that can be downloaded to your smartphone or tablet at little to no cost.

Step 4: Manage your refills

It can be tricky to keep track of all your medication refills. Luckily, there are several ways to get your prescriptions refilled including in person, by telephone, online or by mail. Talk to your healthcare provider to determine which option is best for you. Always try to use the same pharmacy for all of your medications and consider setting up automatic refills.

Each time you pick up a refill:

- Check the label to make sure it has your name on it and instructions from your provider.
- Make sure your pharmacy has an up-to-date list of all the medicines you're taking (including over-the-counter medicines and supplements).
- Make sure you can read the label and open your medicines.
- Ask the pharmacist any questions you have about your medicines.

Step 5: Paying for your medicines

Cost can be a roadblock that prevents people from taking their medicines correctly. The strategies below may help you lower the cost of your medicines:

- **Choose a generic.** When you fill a prescription, your pharmacist may ask if you'd like a brand-name or generic drug. Not all medicines are available in a generic form; your healthcare provider can tell you if it's an option.
- **Bring your drug list to your doctor's appointments.** Request a copy of your drug list (also called a formulary) from your insurance company; this is a list of medicines that it covers. Bringing this list to each appointment can help you and your healthcare provider determine the most cost-effective medicine.
- **Ask about discounts.** Your pharmacy may offer a discount card or a senior discount.
- **Ask for samples.** Before filling a new prescription, ask your doctor for samples you can try first.

If you're still having trouble paying for your medicines, consider using one of these programs:

Medicare Extra Help program: Some people with limited resources and income may be able to receive help to pay for the costs related to a Medicare prescription drug plan. Call **800-772-1213**, go to your local Social Security office or visit www.ssa.gov/medicare/prescriptionhelp.

Pharmaceutical assistance program (PAP): Drug manufacturers may offer assistance programs for people enrolled in a Medicare prescription drug plan. You can find out if the manufacturer of your drug offers a PAP by visiting www.medicare.gov/pharmaceutical-assistance-program.

Sources

1. Food and Drug Administration

www.fda.gov/drugs/resources-you-drugs/medicines-and-you-guide-older-adults

This is for informational purposes only and does not replace treatment or advice from a healthcare professional. If you have questions, please talk with your doctor. Talk to your doctor before beginning an exercise program or making any changes to your diet.