

Medicines: Using Them Safely

Why is it important to use medicine safely?

When used properly, medicines can be helpful or even life-saving. Using them the wrong way, however, may be dangerous. Make sure you follow directions and take your medicines safely.

Some medicines:

- ✓ Can change the way other medicines work.
- ✓ Might cause harmful side effects when combined with another medicine.
- ✓ May be prescribed for one medical problem but make another condition worse.

How do I use my medicine safely?

If you are taking a lot of different medicines, it can be hard to keep track of when to take each one and how much to take. To take your medicines safely, follow these guidelines:

- ✓ Keep a list of your medicines with you. List all of the prescription medicines, nonprescription medicines, supplements, natural remedies, and vitamins that you take. Tell all healthcare providers who treat you about all of the products you are taking.
- ✓ Tell all of your providers about any drug or food allergies you have.
- ✓ Follow the directions that come with your medicine, including information about food or alcohol. Make sure you know how and when to take your medicine. Do not take more or less than you are supposed to take.
- ✓ Many medicines have side effects. A side effect is a symptom or problem that is caused by the medicine. Ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist what side effects the medicine may cause and what you should do if you have side effects.
- ✓ If you take prescription medicine, try to get all of your prescriptions filled at the same place that you get your nonprescription medicine. Your pharmacist can help make sure that all of your medicines are safe to take together.
- ✓ When you refill a prescription, check with your pharmacist if the medicine looks different in color, size, or shape from your previous prescription. Because a medicine may be made by different manufacturers, the pills may look different from one refill to the next. But don't assume that's why your medicine looks different if it's a new refill. Always ask.
- ✓ Store medicines according to the directions on the label.
- ✓ Keep medicines in their original containers unless you use a "dose-reminder" box. These boxes can help you see at a glance if you have taken your medicine for the day. Make sure that you take the right amount of medicine at the right time. Don't take medicines from unlabeled containers.
- ✓ Keep medicines for emergencies in a safe place where you can find them easily.
- ✓ Keep medicines taken by mouth separate from other medicines. Some medicines used on the skin, for example, may be poisonous if you swallow them.
- ✓ Keep all medicines out of the reach of children.
- ✓ Don't keep medicines on a bedside table (except emergency medicines such as nitroglycerin). You may take the wrong medicine or wrong dose when you are not fully awake or alert. Don't take medicines in the dark.

- ✓ Don't use medicines that are past the expiration date on the label. Ask your pharmacist for the best way to dispose of outdated medicines.
- ✓ Don't share prescription medicines with others, even when they seem to have the same symptoms. What may be good for you may be harmful to others.

If you have any questions, ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist for more information. Be sure to keep all appointments for provider visits or tests.

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