

A close-up photograph of a person's hands. The left hand is holding a yellow plastic pill container, tilted to pour a white, oval-shaped pill into the palm of the right hand. The container has a red label with the words "DO NOT DRINK" visible. The background is softly blurred, showing a white surface with other pills scattered on it. The overall lighting is warm and natural.

What You Should Know About
Taking Medicines Safely

How You Can Work with Your Doctor, Nurse and Pharmacist To Make Sure You Are Making Medicines Work For You



Making it work for you.



People know medicines can improve and even save lives. But many people don't know how to take medicines in a way that's safe and most effective.

This brochure addresses questions such as:

- ⊖ How do I know if I need a medicine and which is right for me?
- ⊖ Are there questions I should ask my healthcare provider about my medicine?
- ⊖ How do I take my medicine the right way?
- ⊖ Where should I get my medicine to ensure it's the real thing?
- ⊖ Can I get help paying for my medicine?
- ⊖ What are the benefits and risks of taking medicines?

Where Would We Be Without New Medicines?



Medicines have changed the way we live and help us live longer. They've even changed history.

Before penicillin was widely used, infections killed many soldiers in World War II. The U.S. government asked drug makers to find a way to mass produce penicillin, which was thought of as the world's first wonder drug. The pharmaceutical industry met the challenge and saved thousands of soldiers' lives.

Today, many more valuable medicines are available to prevent and treat many diseases and conditions. But they can only help if they are taken properly.

No medicine can ever be totally safe for everyone. But you and your doctor can work together to get the full benefit of your medicine. In turn, you'll live a healthier life.

Which Medicine Is Right for Me?

No drug is right for everyone.

Medicines may work differently in different people. This depends on gender, age, weight, medical history or other factors. There's no way to know for sure what side effects, if any, you may get from a medicine. That's why you should give your doctor or healthcare provider as much information as you can about yourself and your history.

Talk to your healthcare provider before AND after you start taking your medicine. He or she can predict and manage any side effects you might have.

Only you and your provider can decide if a medicine is right for you.

Make sure your doctor knows:

- Your medical history
- Other medicines you take, including over-the-counter drugs and herbal supplements
- Your lifestyle factors (diet, smoking, drinking, etc.)
- If you have ever had an allergic reaction to any medication

Questions to Ask Your Doctor About Your Medicines

If you're thinking about taking a medicine, ask your healthcare provider:

- Are there options besides taking a medicine (such as diet or exercise) that would work for me?
- How will it help treat my illness?
- What are the benefits versus the risks of taking it?
- What steps can I take to make sure it works best for me?
- When should I follow up with you to discuss how it makes me feel and if it works for me?

Taking Medicines Safely

When medicines are tested for safety, they are tested as they should be used. Taking less or more of your medicine, or taking it at the wrong time, may cause it not to work right. It can even be harmful. **Taking your medicine the right way is important to make sure it works best for you.**

Roughly half of the people taking medicines don't take them properly. Many people may just take their medicine when they feel ill. They may stop taking it when they feel better or no longer think it is helping. This can cause big problems. For example:

- Medicines for high cholesterol or high blood pressure work best if used regularly for a long time. You may not feel a difference. But if you don't take your medicine, it cannot work to improve your health.
- If you stop taking an antibiotic before you're supposed to, the germs may get stronger. Then, they may be harder to kill the next time.

These are good rules to follow when taking a medicine:

- Only take prescription medicines that have been prescribed by your provider.
- Take it just as you were told by your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.
- Read the label.
- Take it at the same time each day so you don't forget.
- Don't skip doses.
- Ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist if you have questions.
- Keep your medicines in the containers that they came in and do not remove the labels.

Tell your healthcare provider if your medicine makes you feel worse or if you want to stop for some reason. He or she may be able to change your dose or switch you to another medicine that could work better for you.

Helpful Tips if You Are an Older Patient

If you're taking more than one medication, use a daily checklist or separate each day's medicines to be sure you take the correct amounts.

- Read the label three times and never take medicine in the dark.
- Wear your reading glasses when you read prescription labels.
- If it is hard for you to take off child-proof caps, ask your pharmacist for easy-open caps.
- Ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist if you have questions.



Getting Medicines the Safe Way

Once you and your doctor decide you need a medicine, it's important to get it from a safe source.

Get your medicine from a licensed pharmacist. Your local pharmacist can answer your questions. He or she can tell you the right way to take your medicine and store it in your home. Your pharmacist can also see what other medicines you take. He or she can warn you of interactions that may occur from taking your medicines together and advise you on how to avoid interactions. He or she can also explain possible side effects you may have from taking your medicines. Plus, when you obtain your medicines from your local pharmacist, you know that they are real medicines.

Sometimes some people prefer to buy medicines from Internet Web sites rather than buying medicines from their local pharmacy. While some well-known pharmacies have safe pharmacy Web sites, not all sites are safe. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has found that some sites distribute the wrong medicine or fake medicine. Visit the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy Web site at www.nabp.net to see which Internet pharmacies are certified as safe.

Remember to only take medicine prescribed for you by your doctor. Never take a medicine from a friend or stranger on the Internet. You may think it's easier than seeing a doctor or pharmacist, but it's not safe.

Don't share your prescription medicine with anyone. Medicines can act differently in different people. Take medicines prescribed by your doctor or with your doctor's recommendation.

A Helping Hand

There are many excellent medicines that can help people live healthier lives. At the same time, many Americans are uninsured and have trouble getting the medicines they need. America's pharmaceutical research companies want to help.

We want everyone who needs medicines to be able to get it. That's why you can get help through the Partnership for Prescription Assistance (PPA):

The PPA is a single point of access to more than 475 public and private patient assistance programs, including 180 programs offered by pharmaceutical companies. More than 2,500 brand-name and generic prescription medicines are available through the participating programs—many for free or nearly free. To learn more, call 1-888-4PPA-NOW or visit www.pparx.org.



Helpful Tips if You Have a Child Taking Medication

Are you the parent of a child who takes medicines? If so, it is very important that you talk to your children about taking their medicines safely.

- Make sure your child knows why he or she is taking the medicine and what it is supposed to do.
- Remind your children to take their medicines.
- Pay attention to your child's response to medicine. If you think the medicine is causing a problem, let your doctor know immediately.
- Encourage your children to learn about the medicines they are taking by asking questions of their doctor, nurse or pharmacist.
- Never change the amount of medicine your child takes without talking to his or her provider.
- Continue your child's medicine as long as his or her healthcare provider tells you to. Do not let your child stop taking his or her medicine just because he or she feels better.
- Teach children that medicines are not candy.
- Teach children the difference between prescription medications and illegal drugs. Use the term "medicines" to talk about prescription and over-the-counter medications.
- Keep all medicines out of reach of young children.
- Be sure that others who care for your children know about their medications and allergies. This includes step-parents, ex-spouses, grandparents, day care personnel, babysitters, school nurses and teachers.
- Ask your child's doctor, nurse or pharmacist if you have questions.

Throwing Away Old or Unused Medicines

If your medicine is expired, you should get rid of it. You should also get rid of medicines that your doctor says you no longer need. Here are some tips for throwing away medicines:

- DO put the pills in a container with water and seal it tightly. Some pills do not come in their own container with a lid. If this is the case, put the pills in a plastic drink bottle filled with water and close the cap tightly. Then, throw the container in your household trash.
- DO NOT throw the medicine into a sink, toilet or storm drain unless the label on the medicine says to throw it in the toilet.

Benefits and Risks of Medicines

All medicines have benefits and risks. Sometimes what you do can increase or decrease the risks of a medicine. Sometimes the risks just exist.

The biggest risk to your health is not taking steps to prevent and treat a disease. Millions of people will die early because they don't get treated for serious conditions.

Compare the benefits and risks of taking a medicine to those of things you do each day to enhance your health, like exercise. You could fall down or pull a muscle. But weight loss and a healthy heart make those risks worthwhile for most people.

From exercising to taking a medicine, do all you can to increase the benefits and lower the risks. **Talk to your healthcare provider and learn how to be as healthy as possible.**



My Health Information

Last Updated: ___/___/___

Using This Form

- Fill out all of the information that you know. Call a loved one or your health care provider if you need help or have questions concerning your medical information.
- Make three copies of the completed record. Keep one copy in your wallet or purse, provide one to a family member or friend, and share the other with your health care providers and pharmacists at all visits.
- You should update this record when:

- Your contact information, insurance provider, health care provider or pharmacy changes.
- Your medical condition changes.
- You start or stop taking a medicine.
- Your health care provider changes the dose of your medicine.
- You visit the health care provider or pharmacist.

PERSONAL INFORMATION

NAME _____
DATE OF BIRTH _____
PHONE NUMBER _____
ADDRESS _____

EMERGENCY CONTACT

NAME _____
RELATIONSHIP _____
PHONE NUMBER _____

INSURANCE PROVIDER (IF APPLICABLE)

NAME _____
TYPE (E.G., PPO, HMO) _____
MEMBER ID NUMBER _____
CONTACT NUMBER _____

PRIMARY CARE PHYSICIAN

NAME _____
PHONE NUMBER _____
ADDRESS _____

OTHER PHYSICIAN(S)

PHARMACY/DRUG STORE

NAME OF STORE _____
PHARMACIST _____
PHONE NUMBER _____
ADDRESS _____

MY ALLERGIES (E.G., MEDICATIONS, FOOD)

Be sure to list adverse reactions and side effects caused by allergies.

MY MEDICAL HISTORY

Be sure to include all medical conditions (e.g., illnesses, surgeries).

NAME OF MEDICINE

DOSE

FREQUENCY
(how often and when)

PURPOSE

DIRECTIONS/NOTES

Be sure to include all prescription medicines, over-the-counter drugs, vitamins and herbal supplements.

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