

INFORMATION ON THE IMPORTANCE OF MEDICATIONS

We are very lucky today to have modern medicines to help treat the many conditions and ailments that are experienced by older adults. Your prescription and non-prescription medications can treat disease, reduce symptoms, and help you live a healthier and more productive life.

But medicines are serious business. And taking medication is not always as easy as just swallowing a pill. It can involve many steps and decisions each day.

Using your medications the right way is very important to your health. The proper use of medicines not only helps you get the full benefit from the medications you take, but also reduces your chances of having side effects and problems that could occur from taking the medication the wrong way.

In order to make the best use of your medicines, it is important to take an active role in decisions about your treatment, to follow your treatment plan as prescribed by your doctor, and to watch out for problems and get help in solving them.

TAKE PART IN DECISIONS ABOUT YOUR TREATMENT

Take part in your treatment decisions. Don't be afraid to ask questions and talk about your concerns. You may want to write down questions to ask at your next visit to the doctor. By taking time to ask questions now, you may avoid problems later.

Don't be afraid to "bother" your doctor with your concerns and questions. Bring a friend or family member with you when you visit your doctor. Talking over your options with someone you trust can help you make better choices, especially if you are not feeling well. You can also talk to your pharmacist about the medications you are taking.

Here are some points to cover each time a new medication is prescribed.

- **Ask about the risks and benefits of each medicine.**
- **Ask how often you or your doctor will have to check your medicine's effects.** For example, checking your blood pressure if you are taking a medicine to lower it, or having a laboratory test done to make sure the levels of medicine in your blood are not too high or too low.
- **Tell your doctor about all the medicines you are already taking.** This includes prescription medicines and the medicines you buy without a prescription, such as aspirin, laxatives, vitamin supplements, and home remedies. Then your doctor can avoid giving you a new medicine that may not work well with one you already take. It is helpful and useful to keep a written list of all the medications you are currently taking—prescription and non-prescription—including the dose and instructions for use.
- **Tell your doctor what is important to you about your medicines.** You may want a medicine with fewest side effects, or fewest doses to take each day. If you have trouble swallowing, you may want a liquid form of medicine. You may care most about cost (there may be a generic drug or another lower-cost medicine you can take), or you may want the medicine your doctor believes will work best.
- **Tell your doctor if you have any allergies to medications or if you have had any troubling side effects from medicines.**
- **Tell your doctor if you have any illnesses or problems for which another doctor or health professional is treating you.**

FOLLOW YOUR TREATMENT PLAN

To follow the treatment plan you and your doctor agree on, ask questions, and tell your doctor your needs and concerns. Here are some points to cover.

- **The name of the medicine and what it is supposed to do.**
- **How and when to take the medicine, how much to take, and for how long.** Ask about any terms or directions you do not understand.
- **What food, drinks, other medicines, or activities you should avoid while taking the medicine.**
- **What side effects the medicine may have, and what to do if they occur.**
- **Whether you can get a refill, and if so, how often.**
- **What to do if you miss a dose.**
- **Ask if there is written information you can take home.** Most pharmacies have information sheets on your prescription medicines.
- **Tell your doctor of any concerns you have about using the medicine.**
- **Tell your doctor if you are not taking your medicine as directed.** For example, some people may stop taking their medicine, take a lower dose, or skip doses if they are having side effects. Your doctor needs to know about any changes in your treatment plan. Do not let guilty feelings or embarrassment keep you from telling your doctor this important information.

Adhering to the medication regimen prescribed by your physician is important for your medications to work properly. Taking your medication in the dose and at the times prescribed can be very important to the action of the medication. If you have any questions or problems with taking the medicine exactly as it was prescribed by your doctor, contact your physician or pharmacist.

WATCH FOR PROBLEMS AND GET HELP SOLVING THEM

Talk to your doctor and pharmacist about any problems you may be having with your medications. Most medicine problems can be avoided or solved if you know what to watch out for and if you talk with your health professional about what is happening.

- **Ask about the results of medical tests that show how the medicine is working.** For example, if you are taking a medication for high blood pressure, it is important to monitor your blood pressure.
- **Ask if the medicine is still needed.**
- **Tell how you are feeling since you started taking the medicine.** Do you think it is helping?
- **Tell about any problems you are having taking your medicine,** including side effects or any new problems that may be related to the medicine. If you experience any effects that you associate with your medication, such as dizziness, drowsiness, confusion, rashes, or other unexplained symptoms, contact your physician or pharmacist immediately.
- **Tell about any new medicines that another doctor gave you, and any new over-the-counter (non-prescription) medicines that you are taking.** Telling which medicines you take is very important—especially if you are seeing more than one doctor.

HOW YOUR PHARMACIST CAN HELP

When you pick up your medicines, always talk to the pharmacist and ask any questions you may have about your medications. Here are some points to cover.

- **The name of the medicine and what it is supposed to do.**
- **How and when to take the medicine, how much to take, and for how long.** Ask about any terms or directions you do not understand.
- **Any special techniques or devices for administering the medication** (e.g., liquids that you need to "shake well" before pouring the dose, or special instructions for the use of inhalers, suppositories, eye drops, or patches).
- **What food, drinks, other medicines, or activities you should avoid while taking the medicine.**
- **What side effects the medicine may cause, and what to do if they occur.**
- **Whether you can get a refill, and if so, how often.**
- **What to do if you miss a dose.**
- **How should the medicine be stored.** Do any of the medicines require refrigeration?
- **Ask if there is written information you can take home.** Most pharmacies have information sheets about your prescription medicines.

Try to use one pharmacy for all your medicine needs. Make sure the pharmacy keeps a complete "profile" of all your medications. Give a complete list of all medications to your pharmacist, including anything that you use that is available without a prescription. Make sure you include things such as vitamin supplements and home remedies, as these may interact with prescriptions you may also be taking. This will help your pharmacist keep track of your medicines, identify any duplicate therapy or potential interactions between the medications you take, and help you solve any problems you may have with your medicines.

STORING YOUR MEDICATIONS

Store all of your medications in a designated location in your residence. Keep all medications stored together in one place unless they require refrigeration or are labeled “store in a cool place.” This will help if an emergency situation occurs and your doctor needs to review all of your medications. Be sure that your medications are stored out of reach of any children that may visit, especially if you have non-child proof containers.

Do not mix different medications together in one container; this will make it difficult if not impossible to identify your medications in an emergency.

Medicines should be stored in a cool, dry area. Do not store your medications in the medicine cabinet in the bathroom or in the kitchen because the heat and moisture may cause deterioration. Instead, store your medications in a designated area in your living room or bedroom.

Medications stored in the refrigerator should be separated from other items in the refrigerator. Consider keeping refrigerated medications in a plastic box or container in one area of the refrigerator.

Oral medications should be kept separate from other items that are for external use only (such as creams and ointment, or reagent tablets).

Expired medications (there are expiration dates on all of your medications) **and any medication that your doctor has discontinued should be discarded.**

Never share or give your medications to another person.

Remember, medicines can only help you if you take them the right way. The information provided here is intended to help you do so.