

MEDICATIONS QUICK GUIDE

According to the Institute of Medicine, medication errors are a cause of injuries in 1.5 million people every year. You should know what all of your medications are for and how to take them safely. Here are a few tips to help you manage your medications.

Keep a List

Write down every medication you take including the brand name, generic name, dose, frequency and reason for taking. Knowing both the generic and brand names will help you avoid taking two of the same medications.

Bring your medication list with you to every appointment or if you have to be in the hospital. You'll should also give a copy of your list to your pharmacist. Update it regularly.

New Medications

If your provider prescribes a new medication, ask all of these questions before you get the prescription filled:

- What is this for?
- Are there other names for this medication? Ask about the generic and brand names.
- What is the dose and how many times a day (or week or month) do I need to take it?
- Is it compatible with all of my other medications?
- Are there any foods or supplements I need to avoid while taking this?
- Do I need to take it with food or on an empty stomach?
- What are the potential side effects?
- How long will I need to take it?
- Do you have the correct information for my pharmacy?
- Will you send my prescription to my pharmacy electronically or will I get a paper script?

Write down the answers to all of these questions and make sure the information matches your new prescription when you receive it from your pharmacy.

Picking Up Your Prescriptions

Errors can, and do, happen at pharmacies. Whenever you pick up a new prescription, make sure you do all of these things:

- Check that your name and DOB is correct.
- Check that the medication name, dosage, frequency and instructions match exactly what your provider told you (and what you wrote down).
- Let your pharmacist know if you have any questions or concerns.
- Update your medication list.

Generic vs Brand Name

Generic medications are almost always cheaper than brand names. If your provider prescribes a brand name medication, ask if there is a generic version. Many insurance plans will only cover generics.

Be aware that not all brand name drugs have a generic equivalent.

It's easy to end up taking two of the same medications that have different names. For example, the blood pressure medicine called Lopressor (brand name) is the same as metoprolol (generic name). Go over your medication list with your provider and pharmacist to make sure none of your drugs are duplicates.

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Medication Safety

- If possible, only use one pharmacy or pharmacist to fill your prescriptions. This way, there are fewer chances for mixups and mistakes.
- Set up an appointment to go over all your medications with your pharmacist. This way, you can make sure you're not taking two of the same type of drugs (with different names), that all of your medications are compatible and you can get all of your questions answered.
- If you take multiple medications, use a pill organizer or ask your pharmacist for 'blister packs.'
- Consider using a timer on your phone or an app to remind you when to take your medications.
- For liquid medications, use an appropriate measuring syringe or cup when calculating the doses. This is especially important for children.
- If small children will be around, make sure your medications are locked away or well out of reach.
- Never take medications prescribed to someone else.
- Never share your medications with anyone.
- If you are in the hospital, make sure you know every new medication that is given to you. Tell your nurse if you have any allergies to medicines or foods. And don't forget your medication list.
- Be careful not to label every side effect as an 'allergy.' If you have side effects that are not tolerable, speak to your provider or pharmacist.

Special Considerations for Older People

As we age, the way our body metabolizes medications changes. This means that older people may need lower doses of certain drugs. Or that some medications useful for younger adults may be harmful for the elderly.

Some classes of drugs such as benzodiazepines (Ativan, Xanax, Valium) and anticholinergics (Benadryl, Ditropan and Atarax) are associated with confusion, memory loss, hallucinations, and many other adverse effects in older people.

Go over each medication including prescriptions, over-the-counter drugs, herbals and vitamins with your provider and pharmacist.

Paying for Your Medications

- Ask your provider to prescribe generic medications when possible.
- Ask your provider for free samples.
- Before you start taking any new medications, check with your insurance company to see if they are covered and how much you will have to pay out-of-pocket. Your pharmacist should also be able to give you an idea of what you may owe.
- If you must take a brand name drug, check the website of the pharmaceutical company to see if they have a discount program.
- Consider using big box pharmacies (such as Walmart) for cheaper prices on generic drugs.
- There are several assistance programs that may be able to help you. Just Google 'prescription assistance programs.' A few examples are RxAssist.org, NeedyMeds.org and Partnership for Prescription Assistance (pparx.org).
- If your insurance suddenly stops paying for any of your medications, let your provider know right away. Ask what other options are available that may be covered.

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Over-the-Counter (OTC) Medications

- Make sure that any OTCs you are taking are compatible with your other medications. Check with your pharmacist to be sure.
- Be aware of the brand names and generic names of OTC medications. For instance, Benadryl (brand name) is also called diphenhydramine (generic name). Tylenol (brand name) is also called acetaminophen (generic name).
- Read labels carefully. Make sure you're not 'double dosing' on any of your medicines. For instance you may take Tylenol (acetaminophen) for a headache and DayQuil for a cold. DayQuil is a combination drug that also includes acetaminophen.
- Medications are sometimes marketed for two or more conditions. For instance, Benadryl (also called diphenhydramine) is branded as an allergy medication and as a sleep aid. When in doubt, check with your pharmacist.
- Even though OTC drugs are available without a prescription, they are potentially dangerous if not used as directed or if you have certain medical conditions. For instance, Tylenol (acetaminophen), while safe if used correctly, is the #1 cause of acute liver failure in the U.S. Be mindful of all medications, vitamins and supplements that you take.
- Some OTC drugs can make conditions worse. For example, ibuprofen (Motrin) can increase the risk of cardiovascular problems in certain people. Always check with your provider before taking any new medications.
- Use caution when taking cold or cough medicines, especially if you have certain conditions such as diabetes or high blood pressure. Some of these drugs contain a fair amount of sugar or have ingredients that can increase your blood pressure. Always check with your pharmacist to be safe.

Vitamins, Herbs & Supplements

Use caution when taking vitamins, herbs and supplements. Most are not FDA-approved and can be dangerous if used incorrectly or if you have certain medical conditions.

Some vitamins, herbs and supplements can interact negatively with your other medications.

Never start a vitamin, herb or supplement without first speaking to your provider and your pharmacist.

WebMD Drug Interaction Checker

WebMD has a tool that allows you to enter your medications to see if there are any potential interactions. **Click here** to access or just Google 'WebMD Drug Interaction Checker.'

This tool is useful, but you should always go over your medication list with your provider and pharmacist.

Compare Prices

To look up and compare prices for your medications check out **GoodRx**.

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