

Making Your Medications Work Better

Developed by the American Pharmacists Association. Improving medication use. Advancing patient care.

Proper Use

Make sure you understand how to take your medication correctly. If you don't know, your pharmacist can help. Taking your medication properly is one way to decrease your health care costs. Thousands of people every year end up in the hospital, fail to get better, and spend more money than they have to because they didn't take their medication properly.

Food & Medication Interactions

Often there are certain foods, drinks, other medications, or even certain activities that should be avoided while taking a particular medication. Foods and drugs interact in many complex ways. Foods can make a medication more or less powerful, and some drugs can interfere with the body's ability to absorb nutrients from food. Few of these interactions are dangerous. But you should be aware of them—especially if you take one or more prescription drugs on a regular basis. Remember to tell your pharmacist or doctor about any other medications you are taking.

Side Effects

Knowing the side effects of a drug you are taking is a very important aspect in making your medications work better, and it can help you report problems early and receive care for them before they become more serious. Your pharmacist can tell you if a side effect is likely and how long the effect may last. Report to your pharmacist or doctor any side effects you experience when taking your medications.

Dosage

Always take your medication as instructed by your doctor and pharmacist. Never change the way you take a medication without first discussing it with your health care professionals. Medications are sometimes given in different strengths or at different times of the day. It may be possible to reduce the dosage without changing its effectiveness for you; however, this decision will have to be made carefully with your health care professionals.

Generic Medications

Ask your pharmacist if there is a generic version of the medication you take. These are products the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has judged equivalent to the brand-name product. Generic medications are usually less expensive than their brand-name counterparts. Your pharmacist can answer any questions concerning your use of these medications.

Compliance

Compliance is taking your medication as instructed by your doctor and pharmacist. A medication will provide little benefit if you skip doses or if you stop taking it to save money or because you "feel better."

Taking your medications with the advice of your pharmacist is a cost-effective form of health care. This is true for your health now and in the future by preventing health problems that could require a more expensive treatment later.

This information is developed and made available by the American Pharmacists Association in cooperation with the U.S. FDA.



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Insurance

Make sure you understand how your insurance plan is set up to cover the cost of your medications. If you're not sure, either call your insurance company or ask your pharmacist. If you can't afford health insurance, ask your pharmacist or doctor how state or private agencies may help pay for your prescription medication.

Cost

To reduce the amount of money you spend per visit to a pharmacy, discuss with your pharmacist the option of obtaining smaller quantities—perhaps 30 tablets instead of 60. To reduce the amount of money you spend per dose of medication, discuss obtaining larger quantities—for example, two months' supply instead of one.

Remember, not all medications are appropriate for quantity adjustments; but if possible, those adjustments can help fit your prescription order to your needs. In any case, discuss the options with your pharmacist and make sure that your insurance will cover the option you choose.

Medication Record

Use this page as an example of how to keep a record of your medications—prescription and nonprescription.

	Medication name	Strength	Date of Rx	Purpose	How much
1					
2					
3					
	Times per day	How long	What to avoid	Most likely side effects	Most likely problems
1					
2					
3					

Note: It's wise to have all your prescriptions dispensed at one location so your pharmacist will have a record of all your medicines.

Be careful when buying in large quantities:

- Keep track of how much you take. Having large supplies of a medication can sometimes lead to over-medication or waste due to medication changes.
- Be sure to store medications properly in a dark, cool, and dry location. Don't keep them in the bathroom "medicine cabinet"; the humidity in the bathroom can alter a medication's effectiveness.
- Discard medications that are old; check the expiration date on all medications. If it is not listed, take the medication to your pharmacist to determine if it can be used safely and effectively.

Agencies

Ask your pharmacist if he or she can refer you to any county or city agency that assists residents with health care costs. Some local organizations will help members of the community on a short term basis to get them through a rough spot.