

# Discharge Instructions: Taking Medicine Safely



Medicine can help treat or prevent illness. But it may not help if you don't take it correctly. It may even hurt you. Your healthcare provider or pharmacist can help you learn the right way to take your medicine. Here are some tips to help you take medicine safely.

## Safety tips

- Have a routine for taking each medicine. Make it part of something you do each day. Take your medicine after brushing your teeth. Or after eating a meal. Know which of your medicines need to be taken with food or on an empty stomach. Or without other medicines.
- Find help getting organized if you take a few medicines. A pill organizer is 1 idea. It can arrange all your medicines for the day. Or for a week at a time.
- Bring all your current medicines to the hospital or your healthcare provider's office. Bring them in their original boxes or bottles. Or bring an up-to-date list of your medicines.
- Don't stop taking a prescription medicine unless your healthcare provider tells you to. Doing so could make your condition worse.
- Don't share medicines.
- Ask your provider about side effects with any new medicines. And when they should be reported.
- Let your healthcare provider and pharmacist know of any allergies you have.
- Don't take a nonprescription medicine without talking with your healthcare provider first. It can be harmful to take prescription medicines with other substances. These include alcohol, illegal drugs, herbs, and supplements. Or even some over-the-counter medicines. Talk with your provider or pharmacist before using any of these while taking a prescription medicine.
- Try using the same pharmacy for all your prescriptions. That may not be possible. If not, let each pharmacist know what medicines you are taking.
- Keep medicines out of the reach of children and pets. Keep medicines in a cool, dry, dark place. Don't put them in the bathroom. Or in the kitchen. There's too much moisture and heat there.
- Don't use medicine that has expired. And don't use medicine that doesn't look or smell right.
- Learn how to safely dispose of your unused or expired medicines. Call your pharmacist or local law enforcement agency to find out how to safely get rid of medicines. Your community may have medicine drop-off locations. Some medicines may be safely flushed down the toilet. But some can't for safety reasons. Several times each year the FDA sponsors Drug Take Back days. This is the time when prescription medicines can be collected safely. See the FDA's website at [www.fda.gov/drugs/safe-disposal-medicines/disposal-unused-medicines-what-you-should-know](http://www.fda.gov/drugs/safe-disposal-medicines/disposal-unused-medicines-what-you-should-know) for medicine disposal safety tips.
- Medicine in a single-dose container should be used only 1 time. If you use the container a second time, it may have germs in it. These can cause illness. These illnesses include hepatitis B and C. They also include brain or spinal cord infections.

## Names of medicines

Medicines have brand names and generic names. A medicine is sold only under its brand name when it's first made. It can later be made and sold as a generic. Generic medicines cost less than medicines with brand names. And most work just as well. Unless your healthcare provider says otherwise, most people can use the generic medicine. A common mistake is to take a generic and a brand name of the same medicine. Some

people do this. They think they're different. This can lead to harmful reactions. This is also a good reason to bring all your prescriptions in their original bottles to your healthcare visits.

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