Medicines can treat diseases and improve your health. If you are like most people, you need to take medicine at some point in your life. You may need to take medicine every day, or you may only need to take medicine once in a while. Either way, you want to make sure that your medicines are safe, and that they will help you get better. In the United States, the Food and Drug Administration is in charge of ensuring that your prescription and [over-the-counter](https://medlineplus.gov/overthecountermedicines.html) medicines are safe and effective.

There are always risks to taking medicines. It is important to think about these risks before you take a medicine. Even safe medicines can cause unwanted [side effects or interactions](https://medlineplus.gov/drugreactions.html) with food, alcohol, or other medicines you may be taking. Some medicines may not be safe during [pregnancy](https://medlineplus.gov/pregnancyandmedicines.html). To reduce the risk of reactions and make sure that you get better, it is important for you to [take your medicines correctly](https://medlineplus.gov/medicationerrors.html). You should also be careful when giving medicines to [children](https://medlineplus.gov/medicinesandchildren.html), since they can be more vulnerable to the effects of medicines.

**medicine**, the practice concerned with the maintenance of [health](https://www.britannica.com/science/health-care) and the prevention, alleviation, or cure of [disease](https://www.britannica.com/science/human-disease).

The [World Health Organization](https://www.britannica.com/topic/World-Health-Organization) at its 1978 international [conference](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/conference) held in the [Soviet Union](https://www.britannica.com/place/Soviet-Union) produced the Alma-Ata Health Declaration, which was designed to serve governments as a basis for planning health care that would reach people at all levels of society. The declaration reaffirmed that

*health, which is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, is a fundamental human right and that the attainment of the highest possible level of health is a most important world-wide social goal whose realization requires the action of many other social and economic sectors in addition to the health sector.*

In its widest form, the practice of medicine—that is to say, the promotion and care of health—is concerned with this ideal.