

Your Medicine: **Play It Safe**

Learn more about how to take medicines safely. Use the *Medicine Record Form* at the back of this booklet to keep track of your medicines.



...health care quality

Have you ever had a problem with your medicines? You are not alone. There are so many things to keep track of. For example, you may have asked yourself:

- When exactly should I take this medicine?
- Is it safe to continue taking my vitamins while I am on this prescription?
- Once I feel better, can I stop taking the medicine?

Medicine is prescribed to help you. But let's face it, it can hurt you if you take too much or mix medicines that don't go together. Many people are harmed each year, some seriously, by taking the wrong medicine or by incorrectly taking the right medicines.

You can help get the best results by being a partner with your health care team. In this booklet, "health care team" includes:

- The **doctor, physician assistant, nurse practitioner, or other professional** who prescribes your medicine for you or is in charge of your care.
- A **nurse** who helps with your care at home, a doctor's office, or a hospital.
- The **pharmacist** who fills your prescription and is available to answer questions about your medicines.

4 Ways to Play It Safe With Medicines

1. Give your health care team all important information
2. Get the facts about your medicine
3. Stay with your treatment plan
4. Keep a record of your medicines



1. Give your health care team important information

Be a partner with your health care team. Tell them all the medicines, vitamins, herbals, and dietary supplements you're already taking. This includes:

- ✓ **Prescription medicines.**
- ✓ **Medicines you can buy without a prescription,** such as aspirin, antacids, laxatives, and cough medicine.
- ✓ **Vitamins and dietary supplements,** such as St. John's Wort or ginkgo biloba.

List your medicines on the form at the back of this booklet.

Be sure to tell your health care team if:

- You have **medicine allergies** or have had problems when taking a medicine before.
- **Other health care providers** have prescribed medicine for you or suggested that you take a vitamin or herbal supplement.
- You plan to become **pregnant**, are pregnant, or are **nursing** a baby.
- You have **any other illness** or medical condition, like diabetes or high blood pressure.
- **Cost is a concern.** There may be another medicine that costs less and will work as well.



2. Get the facts about your medicine

Ask the questions listed on the next page about every new prescription medicine. Get the answers from your health care team **before** starting the medicine.

If your health care provider writes your prescription by hand, **make sure you can read it**. If you can't, your pharmacist might not be able to either. If your health care provider submits your prescription to the pharmacy electronically, ask for a copy of the prescription.

Ask your health care provider to write down on the prescription what the medicine is used for, not just “take once a day” but “take once a day for high blood pressure.”

If you have other questions or concerns:

- Talk to your health care team.
- Write down questions ahead of time and bring them to your appointment.

Taking the time to ask questions now can prevent problems later.

Tips!

- **Write your questions down** ahead of time. Keep a list of questions to ask your health care team. Take the list to your appointment.
- **Take notes** on information you get from your health care team.
- **Bring a friend or family member** with you for your appointments. Talking over what to do with someone you trust can help you make better decisions.
- **Try to use the same pharmacy** for all of your medicines so your prescription records will all be in one place.
- **Read and save the patient information** that comes with your medicine. It's often stapled to the bag from the pharmacy.
- **Keep a list of all the medicine, vitamins, and dietary supplements you take.** Be sure to update the list to show any new medicines or if your dose has changed. Also, cross off anything you stop taking. Use the list at the back of the booklet to keep track. Show this list to your health care team.
- **Make a copy of your list.** Keep the original and give the copy to a friend or loved one.



Once a year I call my pharmacist and make an appointment for her to check everything I'm taking. I put all my medicines and vitamins in a bag. I even put in nonprescription medicines like antacids, pain relievers, and laxatives.

Questions to ask before you take your medicine:

What are the brand name and generic name of this medicine?

Can I take a generic version of this medicine?

What am I taking this medicine for?

Does this new prescription mean I should stop taking any other medicines I'm taking now?

How do I take the medicine and how often do I take it? If I need to take it 3 times a day, does that mean to take it at breakfast, lunch, and dinner, or to take it every 8 hours?

Do I need to take it all, or should I stop when I feel better?

How long will I be taking it? Can I get a refill? How often can I get a refill?

Are there any tests I need to take while I'm on this medicine?

When should I expect the medicine to start working? How can I tell if it's working?

When should I tell the health care provider about a problem or side effect?

Are there foods, drinks (including alcoholic beverages), other medicines, or activities to avoid while I'm taking this medicine?

What are the side effects that can occur with this medicine?

What should I do if I have a side effect?

What happens if I miss a dose?

What printed information can you give me about this medicine?



3. Stay with your treatment plan

Now that you have the right medicine, you'll want to carry out the treatment plan. But that's not always easy. The medicines may cause side effects. Or you may feel better and want to stop before finishing your medicines.

- **Take all the antibiotics** you were prescribed. If you are taking an antibiotic to fight an infection, it is very important to take it for as long as prescribed, even if you feel better before finishing it.
- Ask your health care provider if your **prescription needs to be refilled**. If you are taking medicine for high blood pressure or to lower your cholesterol, you may be using it for a long time.
- If you are having **side effects** or other concerns, tell your health care provider. You may be able to take a different dosage or type of medicine.
- Your medicine was prescribed only for you. **Never give your prescription medicine to somebody else** or take prescription medicine that wasn't prescribed for you, even if you have the same medical condition it is used to treat.
- Ask whether you need blood tests, x-rays, or other **lab tests** to find out if the medicine is working, to find out if it's causing any problems, or to see if you need a different medicine. Ask for any test results.

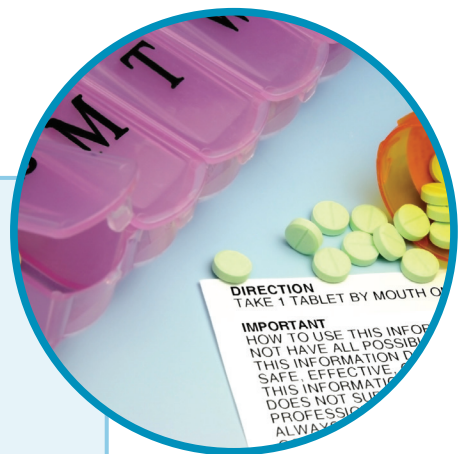
You can get help from

- ✓ A nurse at your workplace.
- ✓ A school nurse who can help your child take medicines on time and safely.
- ✓ A visiting nurse who comes to your home.

Many products can help remind you to take your medicines on time and keep track of the doses you take. There are containers you can fill with your pills for each day of the week, calendars to check off, and even products that fit on top of a pill bottle. Ask your pharmacist for help finding the right product for you.

Friends and family can help by:

- Going with you to your appointments. Ask them to take notes about your medicines and other parts of your treatment plan.
- Picking up your medicine at the pharmacy. Have them show the pharmacist your list of medicines, vitamins, and supplements. They should ask, "Will this new medicine work safely with the other medicines?"
- Calling regularly to remind you to take your medicine on time. If you are having any problems, let them know.
- Keeping a record of everything you take so you don't take anything by mistake.





For more information

To learn about specific medicines online, go to www.medlineplus.gov and click on “Drugs & Supplements.” If you do not have Internet access at home, try your local library.

The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) has booklets about preventing, diagnosing, and treating common health conditions. For a list of topics, visit www.ahrq.gov

4. Keep a record of your medicines

Use the form at the back of this booklet to help you keep track of your medicines, vitamins, and other dietary supplements.

What is a generic medicine?

Generic drugs are safe, effective, and approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). They have the same dosage, safety, quality, performance, and strength as the brand-name drug. The color or flavor may be different, but the active ingredient is the same.

After the patent runs out on a brand-name drug, companies can apply to the FDA to make a generic copy of it. Generic drugs usually cost less than brand-name drugs because the manufacturers didn't pay the costs of developing them.



Be sure to update your list of medicines, including new medications and dose changes.



[illegible]

- ☐ Cold or cough medicine
- ☐ Aspirin or other pain reliever
- ☐ Allergy relief medicine
- ☐ Antacids
- ☐ Sleeping pills
- ☐ Laxatives
- ☐ Diet pills

Other

Medicines I should not take because of bad reactions or allergies



Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality
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Vitamins, herbals, and supplements

Vitamin (type)

- Glucosamine chondroitin
- St. John's Wort
- Ginkgo biloba
- Ginseng

Other

This form can help you keep track of your medicines, vitamins, and other dietary supplements. You can make copies of the blank form and use it again. Take this with you each time you visit your health care team.

Name

H/Phone

W/Phone

C/Phone_

Medicine Record Form

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Keep this guide with your medicines in case you have any questions, concerns, or worries.

Doctor _____

Phone _____

Doctor _____

Phone _____

Doctor _____

Phone _____

Nurse _____

Phone _____

Pharmacist _____

Phone _____

24-Hour Pharmacy _____

Phone _____

This guide was developed by the National Council on Patient Information and Education (NCPIE) and the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ).

Cut Here



Fold Here

Blood type _____

Medical conditions _____

Emergency Contact

Name _____

H/Phone _____

W/Phone _____

C/Phone _____



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