
USING MEDICINE SAFELY



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USING MEDICINE SAFELY

Medicines today are powerful chemicals that are more effective than ever before. Used carefully they can work wonders. However, both prescription and over-the-counter (nonprescription) medicines can create problems, especially if misused or abused. You probably try to find out about movies and restaurants before going to them, how to use new appliances, and what to do if a product does not work well. It's even more important to get good information about your medicines. Protect your health—be knowledgeable about the drugs you take.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT YOUR MEDICINES

One of the most effective weapons against problems with medicines is to get all the facts. Here's what you should know about each medicine you take.

Name. Know either the brand name or the generic name.

Purpose. Find out what the drug is for and how it is supposed to help. Should it reduce pain or fever? Should it lower blood pressure or cure infection?

How and when to take it. Find out when and how often you should take the medication. Should you take it before, with, or after meals? Should you take it at bedtime? If it is prescribed "as needed" what does that mean? What should you do if you miss a dose?

How long to take it. Many medicines need to be finished completely or continued for several days even though you feel better. Stopping a medicine too soon may not allow it to work completely, resulting in a relapse or flare-up of the original problem. Other medicine is intended only for a short time and should not be continually refilled unless necessary.

What to expect. Know what results to expect from the medicine and what to do if these results do not occur.

How quickly it will work. Find out how long it should take for the medicine to work. Some medicines act quickly, for example, nitroglycerin for angina (chest pain). Other medicines take time to work; for

example, antidepressants may take four weeks or longer to be effective and some drugs for arthritis may take several weeks to ease pain.

Possible side effects. Any medicine can have side effects. Side effects may be of no clinical significance, for example, a change in the color of urine or loose bowel movements; or they may be serious, for example, dizziness, sexual dysfunction, memory problems, or depression. Ask your doctor:

- What are possible side effects I should be aware of?
- What should I do if side effects or unexpected reactions occur?
- When should I call you about side effects?

Cautions and warnings. Know any cautions you should observe while taking the medicine. Ask your doctor:

- What foods, beverages, or other medicines should I avoid while taking this medicine?
- Should I avoid drinking alcohol?
- Are there activities I should avoid? For example, should I avoid driving a vehicle, operating machinery, or exposure to the sun?

Ask your doctor or pharmacist questions. If you don't understand how or why to take your medicine, you could make a serious mistake. If you're not sure about directions, ask your pharmacist or doctor rather than guessing. If you have difficulty hearing or remembering instructions, ask your doctor or pharmacist to write them down. Many prescription drugs come with printed information. Ask your pharmacist if an information sheet is available for your medication.

HELPING YOUR DOCTOR HELP YOU

You and your doctor are partners who share a common goal—your good health. Using your medications wisely and safely requires good communication between you and your doctor. Follow these guidelines to ensure you’re getting complete instructions from your doctor.

Be prepared to provide your doctor with complete and accurate information. Before your appointment, make a list of the following:

- *Your symptoms.* Describe the symptoms you have experienced—for example, changes in sleep or bowel habits, headaches, pain, or fatigue. Be clear, specific, and concise. This helps the doctor make a proper diagnosis and determine the best treatment.
- *Allergies.* List any allergies and reactions you have to foods and other substances.
- *Adverse medication reactions.* List all medicine you have had a negative reaction to, describe the specific reaction, and when it occurred.
- *All medicines you are taking.* Write down the names of all medicines you take, including those you bought without a prescription—such as aspirin, cold remedies, antacids, and laxatives—and those prescribed by other doctors. Doctors need to know about over-the-counter medicines you take because some can significantly impact the effectiveness of prescription medicines. Every doctor you see needs to know *all* of the medicines you are taking. Without this information, a doctor may prescribe a medicine that is similar to one you are already taking—and you could end up with a

double dose—or a medicine that may interact dangerously or cancel the effects of another medicine.

- *Other medicinal preparations.* Share information about substances such as herbs, vitamin or mineral supplements, extracts, and bee pollen that you are taking. Tell your doctor the amount and frequency with which you take such preparations.
- *Caffeine and alcohol consumption.* List the amount of coffee, tea, soft drinks, and alcohol you drink in an average day.
- *Smoking habits.* Write down the number of cigarettes, cigars, or pipes you smoke daily (or the amount of tobacco you chew).

Make a list of questions to ask your doctor.

If the doctor does not have time to answer your questions, ask who in the office can. Answering your questions is part of the doctor’s responsibility.

Be sure you understand what your doctor tells you. Tell the doctor if you do not understand any terms used or instructions given. No question that you have is a “dumb” question. You have a right to information about your health and prescription drugs in language you can understand. If you have difficulty hearing, or if language is a barrier, arrange for someone to go with you or have the doctor put explanations and instructions in writing.

Keep a medicine chart. (See page 15.) Take the chart with you when you visit your doctor. Ask questions about the medication’s purpose, side effects, dosage, description, and special instructions so that you can fill in information about each medicine.



Tell the doctor if you think you may have problems taking a medicine. If you think you will not be able to take a medicine as directed, say so and be specific about the reason it will be difficult.

- Is cost of medicine a problem? Ask if a less expensive and equally effective generic drug is available.
- Is the schedule for taking the medicine too complicated? If so, perhaps your doctor can prescribe an equally effective medicine that can be taken once a day instead of three times a day.
- Do you feel you should be able to solve your health problem, for example, depression, without taking drugs? If so, explain this so the doctor can explain the advantages or disadvantages of the medicine.

- Do you think you will have difficulty actually taking the medicine—swallowing the pills, giving yourself an injection (for example, insulin), putting drops in your eyes, or inserting a suppository?

The better the information you share, the more it can help your doctor prescribe medicine that will work for you and the condition being treated.

Once you leave the doctor's office, you are responsible for obtaining your medicines and taking them as instructed. You have a need—and a right—to know how to do this properly.

WORKING WITH YOUR PHARMACIST

Your pharmacist is the best person to talk to about all of your medications. A pharmacist can do the following:

Provide reliable information on all medicines. The pharmacist is an expert on both prescription and over-the-counter medicines. The pharmacist is knowledgeable about possible side effects, drug interactions, and how to properly use medicines.

Verify what your doctor said. Perhaps you did not get enough information or are not completely clear about what the doctor told you about a medicine. Your pharmacist can verify what your doctor said and answer your questions.

Monitor the medicines you take. It is important to always use the same pharmacy. If you are a regular customer, the pharmacy may keep a record of the medicines you purchase or a complete patient medication profile.

Keep a patient medication profile. A patient medication profile tracks your medicine and allergy history, medical conditions that need to be considered, and all the medications (prescription and over-the-counter) you take. It offers these advantages:

- Serves as a check against taking medicines that you might be allergic to.
- Reduces the possibility of taking a medicine which your medical history indicates is not appropriate.
- Helps prevent undesirable drug interactions, especially when you are taking medicines prescribed by more than one doctor.

- Enables the pharmacist to alert you and your doctor to potential problems with your medicines.
- Enables the pharmacist to better monitor whether you are taking your medicines properly, and remind you when you need a prescription refill.
- Enables the pharmacist to better advise you about over-the-counter medicine.

Buying all of your medicines from one pharmacy that maintains a patient profile for customers can help prevent medication problems. Choose one pharmacy that you like and stick with it. To select a pharmacy, ask these questions:

- *Do you keep patient profiles?*
- *How is the patient profile used?* Some pharmacies keep records primarily for payment and tax purposes; others keep records which are more complete. Choose a pharmacy that uses the profile to screen for possible drug interactions and allergies.
- *When is the patient profile checked?* Choose a pharmacy that checks your record for potential drug interactions each time you fill a prescription.

In addition, choose a pharmacy where the pharmacists take time to explain your medicine to you and answer your questions. Some pharmacies have designed a special area where you can privately discuss questions or concerns you have about your medicines.

If you move and change pharmacies, request a copy of your profile. This could be helpful to the new pharmacist—and a new doctor.

TAKING MEDICINES SAFELY

The federal government takes precautions to ensure that the medicine available to us is safe and effective. Doctors and pharmacists can help. But ultimately, each one of us is responsible for how we take our medicines. Here's what you can do to ensure you are taking your medicines safely:

Take medicine in its original form. Never crush pills or open capsules to make them easier to swallow, unless approved by a health care professional. Changing the form of medicine may alter its stability and absorption. Some medications are coated to protect them from gastric enzymes or to protect the stomach from drug irritation; if crushed or broken, they may not work as intended.

Drug overdose can result from changing the form of medicines. Some medicines are designed with multiple coatings of time-release beads that permit slow absorption of the medicine. When time release capsules are crushed, a greater than normal amount of the medicine is released, and overdose or intense side effects can occur.

Take medicines with water. Water is the best beverage for taking medicines. Drink a full glass.

- Do not mix medicines into hot drinks. Hot temperatures can destroy the effectiveness of certain drugs.
- Do not swallow medicine with alcohol. Alcohol can dissolve coatings on time-released tablets and capsules, causing too much medication to be released too soon. Drinking even a small amount of alcohol with certain medicines can greatly increase the depressant effect on the brain. Mixing alcohol and

medicine may cause excessive drowsiness, coma, or death. Drinking alcohol is particularly dangerous with the following medicines:

- Antihistamines
- Tranquilizers, sedatives, or barbiturates
- Antidepressants
- Pain medication

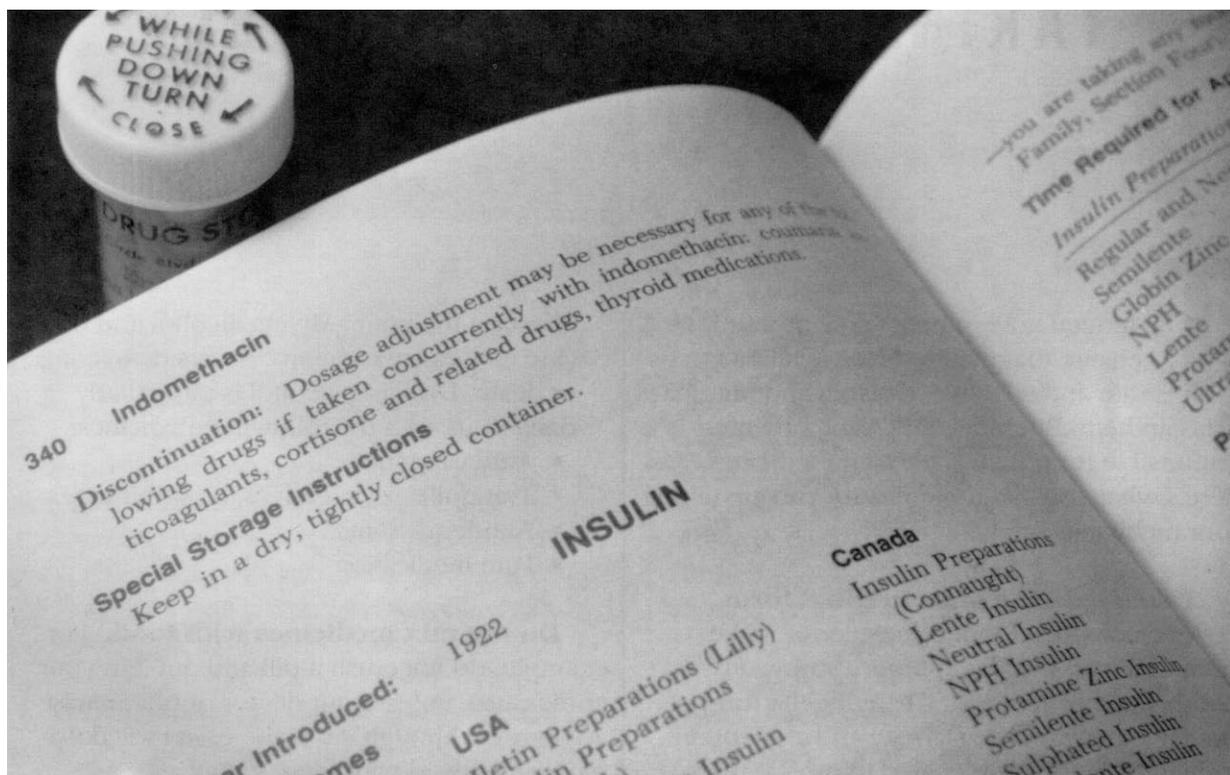
Do not mix medicines with food. For example, do not crush a pill and put it in your applesauce, unless your doctor or pharmacist approves. Although it may be easier to take a medicine mixed with food, it may alter a medication's effectiveness. If you are given approval to mix a medicine with food, mix only one dose at a time just before you take it.

Read the label before taking medicine. Make sure you are taking the right medicine before you take it. Get into the habit of verifying the name on the label, not just the shape or color of the container.

- Never take medicine in the dark, no matter how sure you are about its location. Turn on the light and read the label.
- If you wear glasses, make sure you have them on when you take your medicine.
- If the print on labels is too small, ask the pharmacist to write instructions in large print.

Discard medicines that are old or have changed. Don't take any medicine that is expired, decayed or changed, in an unlabeled container, or no longer needed. Throw it out.

Medicines do not last indefinitely. Manufacturers conduct tests to determine the length of time a given



drug stays active and can be stored safely. The expiration date is valid only if a medicine has been stored properly. Medicine which has changed in color or odor, is crumbly, or appears different in any way may be toxic or have lost its effectiveness. An expiration date is on all prescription and over-the-counter labels.

Keep an up-to-date medication record. This should include all prescription and over-the-counter medicines, their dosages, and how long you've taken them. Share this record with your doctors. This is particularly important if you see more than one doctor. This record helps your doctors prescribe medicine that won't interact badly with another. You can use this record to occasionally review your need for medication with the doctor.

PRESCRIPTION MEDICINE

The use of some medicines must be closely monitored and controlled. You should keep your doctor informed about your health condition and follow

prescription instructions carefully.

Take medicines as directed. If you do not follow the instructions exactly, your medicines may not work properly.

- Don't change the dosage or schedule without checking with your doctor. Increasing or decreasing a dosage or taking a medicine more or less often than prescribed can seriously reduce its effectiveness. "More is better" does not apply to medicine.
- If you miss a dose, don't take a double dose to make up for it.
- Don't try to save your medicine. Take medicine as prescribed to protect your health; it is far less expensive than hospitalization.

Tell the doctor if you didn't have a prescription filled or didn't take the prescribed dosage. Otherwise, the doctor may think the treatment is not working and prescribe another medicine—which may be less effective or have more side effects than

the original medicine—when the problem is that the medicine was not taken as directed. Keep a record of any doses you miss and share this with your doctor.

Take medicine until the doctor tells you to stop. Even if the symptoms have disappeared and you feel better, continue taking your medicine as directed until it is gone. If you stop taking it too soon, the symptoms may return or worsen. If you feel a medicine is not doing what the doctor said it would do, or if it seems to be causing more harm than good, call your doctor.

Take medicines prescribed only for you. Sharing prescription medicines is dangerous. Never take medicines prescribed for someone else or lend medicines to others. Even though your symptoms appear to be the same, you may be suffering from an entirely different problem.

Prescriptions are written based on a person's health problem, physical condition, age, and weight. What is safe and effective for one person may produce side effects, no relief, or a severe reaction for another person.

Know what the prescription label information means. Labels provide information about how to use medicine. But, sometimes instructions may not be clear or correctly understood. For example, do you know what these instructions mean?

- *Take as directed.* What were the directions?
- *Take three times a day.* Around the clock or during waking hours? Do you take at specific times evenly spaced, such as 7 A.M., 3 P.M., and 11 P.M., or do you just take three doses any time during the day?
- *Take as needed.* As needed for what? What determines need? Headache, back pain, or...? Does “as needed for pain” mean severe pain or should you take it for minor discomfort?
- *Take two tablets daily.* When? Morning or afternoon, or one in the morning and one in the afternoon?
- *Take before bedtime.* Immediately before bed or 1-2 hours before?

- *Take before meals.* Immediately before meals or 1-2 hours before?

If instructions seem vague, ask your pharmacist to advise you about when and how to take your medicine so you get the most benefit.

Ron Thalman'
Robinwood Pharmacy
19137 Willamette Dr. • West Linn, OR 97068 **635-3516**

No. **215231** ① Dr. **Morita, L.** ⑦
Ronald Baker ②
Take one tablet daily ③

LANOXIN 0.25MG ④ # **100** ⑧
Refills 8 of 9 ⑤ **Burroughs Well** ⑨
11/12/91 ⑥ Discard After **12/93 RT** ⑩

- ① Prescription Number
- ② Patient's Name
- ③ Medication Dosage Instructions
- ④ Name of Drug
- ⑤ Refill Information
- ⑥ Date Prescription Filled
- ⑦ Doctor's Name
- ⑧ Quantity
- ⑨ Drug Manufacturer
- ⑩ Potency Expiration Date/Pharmacist's Initials

Carry a medication record card in your wallet. The card should list important facts about your health, such as health problems, medications you take, and drugs to which you are allergic. It could save your life! The information is helpful if you are involved in an accident, if you faint, black out, or you are away from home and require medication. Emergency staff can give you better treatment if they have this information.

Wear an emergency medical identification bracelet or chain if you are allergic to a medicine or other substances (for example, bee venom), or if you have

a medical condition, such as diabetes, that affects how you should be treated in an emergency. Contact your pharmacist or MedicAlert (1-800-432-5378) for an emergency medical identification to keep with you at all times.

PERSONAL MEDICATION INFORMATION

ALLERGY: _____

CURRENT MEDICATIONS: _____

MY DOCTOR IS: _____ PH: _____

MY PHARMACY IS: _____ PH: _____

Do not ask the pharmacist for unprescribed refills. Refrain from asking your pharmacist to refill a prescription without consulting with your doctor first. A pharmacist is legally obligated to only dispense medicine prescribed by a medical doctor. Some medicines are habit forming; others should not be taken for extended periods of time. Generally, automatic refills should be avoided. Your medication should be reevaluated at regular intervals.

OVER-THE-COUNTER MEDICINE

Give as much care to taking over-the-counter medicine as you give to taking prescription medicines. Over-the-counter medicine differs from prescribed medicine in that the active ingredients, mix of ingredients, and recommended dose are considered relatively safe.

If taken in large dosages, some over-the-counter medicines are equal in strength to prescription medicines. Some medicine that formerly required a prescription is now available over-the-counter. For example, the pain reliever ibuprofen is now a common ingredient in many over-the-counter medications.

Don't use any over-the-counter drug longer than recommended on the label without first checking with your doctor or pharmacist.

Just because a medicine can be purchased with-

out a prescription does not mean it is 100 percent safe. Over-the-counter medicines can create problems in these ways:

- *Change the effect of prescribed medicines.* Over-the-counter medicine may make a prescribed medicine either stronger or less effective. As a result, the doctor, unaware that you are taking over-the-counter medication, may mistakenly decrease or increase the dosage of the prescribed medicine.
- *Mask symptoms of disease.* Antacids, for example, taken for an upset stomach may cover up warning symptoms of ulcers and delay diagnosis and treatment.
- *Lead to overdose.* An over-the-counter medicine can have effects similar to a prescribed medicine. Combined, the medications may lead to drug overdose.
- *Alter normal body function.* Habitual use of laxatives and enemas, for example, can decrease normal bowel function.
- *Aggravate existing health problems.* For example, antacids may produce magnesium toxicity in some patients with kidney problems. Some antacids contain large amounts of sodium (for example, Alka Seltzer and Bromo Seltzer), and should not be taken by people on low-sodium diets because it may alter their blood pressure.

Read the label on the package. Labels for over-the-counter medicines have detailed information. Reading and understanding product labels is critical to using over-the-counter medicines safely. It's especially important to read labels carefully if you have a special health problem or are on a special diet. For instance:

- If you have high blood pressure or diabetes, you should not take decongestants unless prescribed by a doctor.
- If you have high blood pressure, or are on a low sodium or salt-free diet, you should avoid products containing sodium bicarbonate (a common antacid) or other forms of sodium. Labels provide ingredient information and may indicate whether a product is considered salt-free or low in sodium.

Read the label before purchasing an over-the-counter medicine so you are sure it is safe for you. Read the label even if you have purchased the product before because ingredients change. New warnings are sometimes added. Watch for label banners or flags indicating a significant product change. Be sure you understand the following:

- *Indications for use.* Is the drug meant to be used in the way you plan to use it?
- *Ingredients.* Does the product contain anything you should avoid?
 - What are the active and inactive ingredients? What do they do?
 - Are you allergic to any of the ingredients?
 - Are you sensitive to any ingredients because of a chronic health condition?
 - If you are on a low-salt diet, what is the sodium content?
 - If you are on a low-sugar diet, what is the sugar content?
- *Warnings.* What are the product warnings?
 - Who should not take the medicine?
 - Should you use it for a short time only?
 - Are you currently taking any medicine that the medication should not be taken with?
 - Are there any foods or beverages you should avoid while taking the medication?
 - Are there any circumstances under which a person should see a doctor before taking the medicine?
 - What are the symptoms that indicate the medication should be discontinued?
 - When should a doctor be consulted if symptoms persist?
- *Directions.* What are the directions for taking the medicine?
 - What is the appropriate dose?
 - How often should it be taken?
 - How long should it be taken?
 - How should it be taken?
- *Cautions.* What should you be cautious about with this product?
 - Are there any activities you should avoid while taking the medicine (for example, driving, drinking alcoholic beverages)?
 - Can you follow the cautions?

- What should you do in the case of an overdose?
- *What are possible side effects?* What side effects might you expect?
- *When does the medicine expire?* After what date should you no longer use the medicine?

Most over-the-counter medicines have tamper-resistant packaging and carry information about how to check for evidence of tampering. Do not take the medicine if packaging or contents are not intact or look questionable.

GENERIC MEDICINE

A generic name is the name given when a new medicine is invented. It's the medicine's official name. A brand name is the name a company gives a drug for marketing purposes. Examples of generic and brand name medicines are:

GENERIC	BRAND
aspirin	Bayer, Bufferin, Anacin
diazepam	Valium
acetaminophen	Tylenol

A generically equivalent medicine is usually less expensive. Because of the costs that drug companies incur in developing, advertising, and promoting their products, brand name medicines are generally higher in price than products sold under the generic name.

Both brand name and generic medicines must meet standards and be approved by the United States Food and Drug Administration. A generically equivalent drug has the same active ingredients, strength, and dosage as its brand name counterpart. Before switching to a generic medicine, check with your doctor or pharmacist.

Not all drugs are available in generic form. After developing a new medicine, a company receives a patent on it that lasts for 17 years. During this time, no other company can manufacture it and it is not available in generic form. Ask your doctor or pharmacist to see if a generic drug is available.

STORING MEDICINE

How you store your medicines is important. Improper storage can cause medicines to lose their strength, disintegrate, or even become dangerous because of chemical changes. Three common mistakes are:

- Putting medicine on windowsills
- Keeping medicine in the bathroom
- Mixing medications together in one container

Here's how to safely store your medicines:

Store medicines in a cool, dark, dry place (unless otherwise instructed). Most medicines should be stored between 50-68°F. Higher or lower temperatures, as well as light and humidity, can alter the effectiveness of medicines. Store medicines on a shelf in a hall or bedroom closet, or in a kitchen cabinet that is not close to the oven or stove, and is out of the reach of children, in a locked container.

Do not store medicine on windowsills, in the bathroom, near heat-producing surfaces or appliances, or in the car. Despite its name, the bathroom medicine cabinet is one of the worst places for medicine because of heat and moisture. Do not store medicine in the refrigerator unless instructed to do so. Auxiliary labels tell you if refrigeration or other special storage is required. If you are not sure about how or where to keep a medication, ask your pharmacist.

Keep medicines in original labeled containers. Medicines are dispensed in containers designed to protect the drug. For example, brown containers are used for light-sensitive medicines, and glass containers are used for medicines which can be absorbed by plastics (for example, nitroglycerin tablets).

The label on the original container provides important information. Intact labels ensure you know which medicine is in which container and in an emergency medical personnel can quickly identify your medicines.

Use the rule of “keeping medicines in original containers” when you travel. Ask your pharmacist for smaller containers, with labels, for your medicines. A decorative plastic or metal pill box or travel case may be unsuitable or may be dangerous because it is unlabeled. Before using a commercial pill container, talk with the pharmacist about the best type of container.

Store medicine out of the reach of children and pets. A major cause of accidental poisoning is young children taking a parent's or grandparent's medicine. All medicines should be stored out of children's reach. Childproof safety caps on medicine and a locked cabinet are best. A locking tackle or tool box works well.

Keep medicine containers tightly closed. Caps on medicine containers are designed to protect against moisture.

-
- *Check your medicine storage area regularly. Flush medicines down the toilet that are expired, altered in some way, in containers without labels, or no longer needed. Throw empty containers, not medicines, into the garbage.*
 - *Store medicines in their original, labeled containers, in a place protected from light, humidity, and heat.*
-

KEEPING TRACK OF TAKING MEDICINES

To get the most benefit and reduce risks from your medicine you must take it as directed. Sometimes this is difficult, particularly if you are taking several medicines daily, at different times, and with different instructions.

An organizer system can make keeping track of medicines easier and ensure that you take the right medicine at the right time. There are a variety of organizer systems that you can make or buy. Having a system that works for you is what counts.

MEDICINE CHART

A medicine chart is a basic guide to your medicine use. It usually includes the following information:

- Drug Name (what it is called)
- Purpose (what it is for)
- Description (color, shape, other identifying features)
- Directions (when and how it should be taken)
- Special instructions (other pertinent information, possible side effects, or precautions)

A large sheet of paper may be used to make a poster-sized chart and a smaller sheet to make a chart you can carry with you when you visit the doctor or pharmacist, or are away from home. If the shape, size, color, or when and how you should take your medicine changes, correct the description on your medicine chart.

Your doctor or pharmacist may also be able to help you obtain a personal medication record booklet to help organize your medication information. (See example on page 20).

WEEKLY CHECK-OFF FOR MEDICATIONS

A check-off chart can be used to guide and document your medicine schedule. To make one, use 8 1/2 x 11-inch ruled paper. Starting from the right side, mark off seven 3/4-inch columns. Label these columns for days of the week, starting with Sunday. In the column to the left of the day columns, list the name and dosage for each medicine, and the time to be taken (see example on page 21). Each time you take a medicine, check it off on the chart. You may want to make photocopies of the chart.

COLOR-CODED SYSTEM

A coding system, used in combination with a medicine chart or check-off chart, can be particularly useful if you have difficulty reading prescription labels. Use colored self-adhesive labels or colored markers to code the labels of the medicine containers. Put a color mark by the name of the medicine on your chart that matches the color mark on the label of that medicine's container. (If you take more than five or six medicines, you may want to use letters of the alphabet instead of colors). Consider these suggestions:

- Use colors that are distinctly different from one another. (To some older people, dark green, navy blue, and black look the same.)
- Make sure you can see the color clearly, but do not obscure label information.
- Be sure to mark the medication containers, not the caps. Caps may be returned to the wrong containers.
- When refilling a prescription, be sure to give the new medicine container its proper color code.

CALENDARS

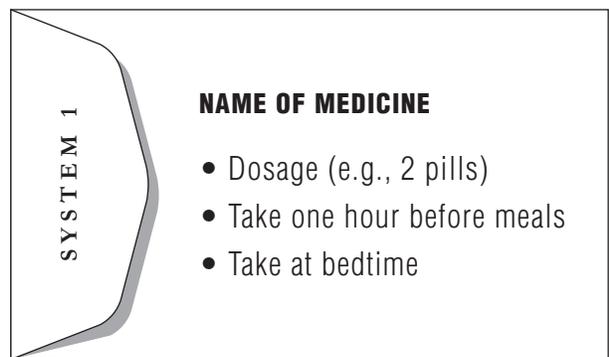
Calendars can help remind you to take medication. If you take medicine only once a day, consider using a daily tear-off calendar. Tear off the dated page after the medicine is taken.

If you take multiple medicines, a calendar with large squares may be helpful. Mark on each day when medicine is to be taken. Each time you take a medication, check it off in the square.

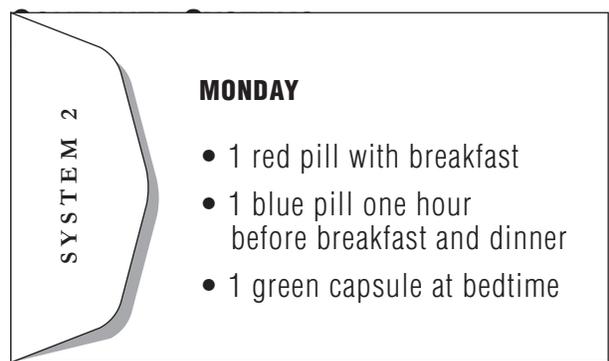
ENVELOPE SYSTEMS

An envelope system can be particularly useful if it is difficult for you to open bottles or read medication labels. There are two types of envelope systems:

- *System One.* Put each medicine in a separate envelope. Write the name of the medication, dosage, and times to take it on the envelope.



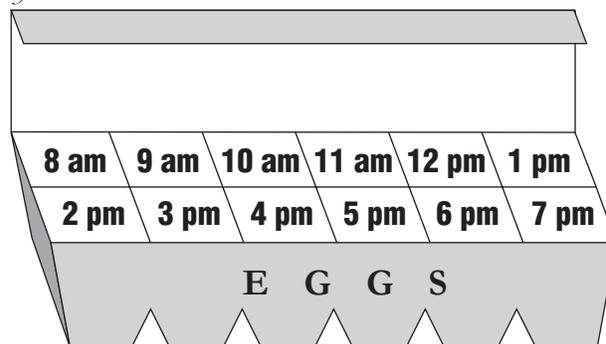
- *System Two.* Put a day's worth of pills into one envelope. Label each envelope with the day of the week, the dosage of each medicine, and when to take it.



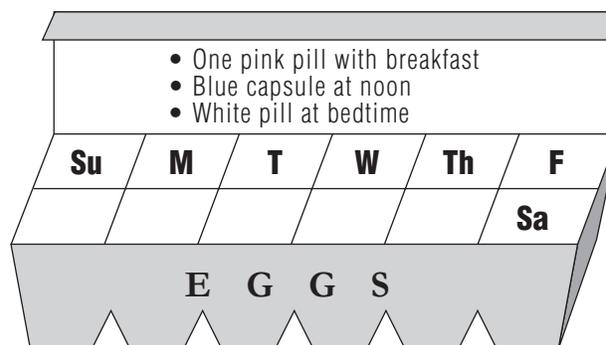
A container system works best if you take the same pills in the same dosages every day and if it is easy to tell the difference between your pills. An egg carton works well to make a *daily system*. For example:

1. Label each of the 12 slots for hours of the day.
2. Put the pills into the appropriate slots each morning.
3. Take pills that are in the 8 A.M. slot at that time, and so on.

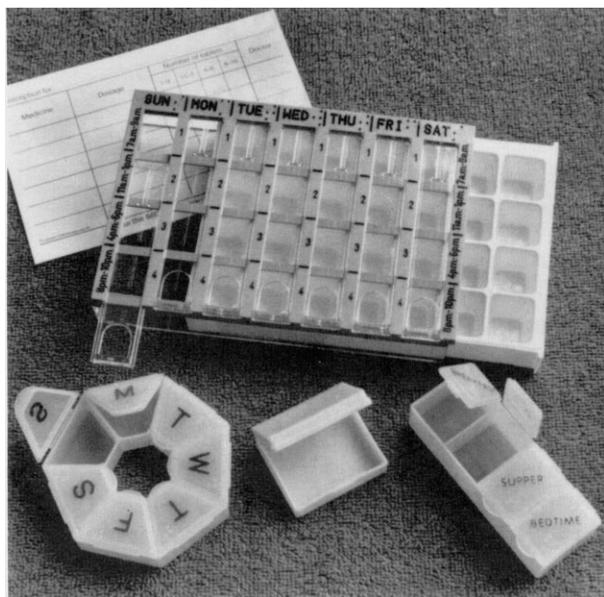
An egg carton also can be used to make a *weekly system*:



1. Label 7 of the slots according to the day the pill is to be taken.
2. Put the medicine for one day in each of the slots.
3. Write on the inside of the carton lid the time when each pill is to be taken.



Commercial medication containers are available for multiple and single dosages by the day or the week.



COMMERCIAL CONTAINERS

You, or a friend or relative, can fill the container for a week and then take your medicines at the specified times.

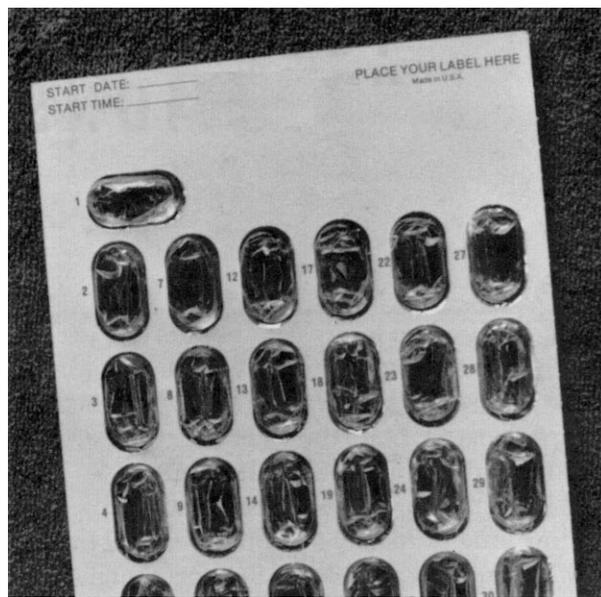
Ask your pharmacist about the different types of systems available. Also, be sure a system is right for you and that it is easy to use.

Check with your doctor or pharmacist before using an envelope or container system to verify it is suitable for your medicines. Some medicines must be kept in tightly covered, light-proof containers.

THE CALENDAR (OR BLISTER) CARD

The calendar card is a day-by-day dosage card for people who take several medications at different times.

Each card contains 31 separate sections (called blisters) large enough to hold several pills or capsules.



BLISTER CARD

Each blister has the day of the month next to it (from 1 to 31), with corresponding stickers indicating the day.

A card is prepared by the pharmacist for each time of day a person takes medicine. If a person takes medicine four times during the day, four cards are prepared. All doses are sealed into the card. Cards are customized for each person and repackaged to accommodate changes in prescriptions.

Ask your pharmacist if your medication can be packaged and dispensed in a calendar card. You may have to pay a little more for the service, but if it helps you to take your medicines properly, it's worth it.

After using the calendar card, one 82-year-old woman said, "I now feel I can control my own medicines." Any system that helps you take your medicines as instructed is helpful.

YOUR PRESCRIPTIONS: QUESTIONS TO ANSWER

Be sure you know the answers to each of these questions when a medicine is prescribed for you. Talk to your doctor and pharmacist to get the facts.

- What is the name of the medicine?
- What is the medicine supposed to do?
- How long is it likely to be before I feel better?
- What are the possible side effects I might experience from the medicine?
- What should I do if side effects occur?
- Are there any side effects I should report to the doctor?
- How and when do I take this medicine?
- Are there any special instructions for taking this medicine?
- How long should I take this medicine?

- Are there any foods, beverages, medications, or activities I should avoid while taking this medicine?
- Under what circumstances, should I stop taking this medicine?
- What should I do if I miss a dose?
- How should the medicine be stored?

Other questions you may want to ask are:

- Is this medication really needed?
- Is the medicine available in a generic form that costs less? Is the generic form as effective? If so, can the generic drug be substituted for the brand name medicine?
- Can the prescription be refilled? If so, am I to see the doctor before having it refilled?

HOOKED ON A PRESCRIPTION DRUG?

Anyone can become addicted to prescription medicines. Drugs that are used to relieve pain, anxiety, depression, insomnia, coughs, and suppress appetite are major culprits.

If you have been using a prescription drug for some time, take this self-test to determine whether you might be dependent.



PRESCRIPTION DRUG SELF-TEST

YES NO

- Have family members or your doctor ever told you they were worried about your use of medicines?
 - Do you get annoyed or uncomfortable when others talk about your use of pills?
 - Have you been treated previously for alcohol abuse, prescription drug abuse, or other drug abuse?
 - After having been turned down for a refill, have you ever changed doctors or drug stores in order to get more of the medicine?
 - Have you been taking diet pills, tranquilizers, pain medicine, or sleeping pills for more than two months?
 - Are you using your pills more as a crutch than as a solution to a temporary medical problem?
 - Do you take your pills on the sly, or hide that you are taking them?
 - Do you feel you might be addicted to your prescription medicine?
-

If you answered yes to any of these questions, there's a possibility you are physically or psychologically addicted to your medicine. If you have concerns, talk to your doctor.

(This test was adapted from: Hooked On You, Hope Health Publications, 1990, page 16.)

MEDICINE CHART

PRESCRIPTION DRUGS					
Name/Purpose	Description (color,shape)	How often to take	How long to take	Possible side effects	Special instructions (e.g. take w/ meals)

OVER-THE-COUNTER DRUGS					
Name/Purpose	Description (color,shape)	How often to take	How long to take	Possible side effects	Special instructions (e.g. take w/ meals)

WEEKLY CHECK-OFF CHART

DRUG NAME/DIRECTIONS	MON	TUES	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
DRUG A: 2 pills 3 times a day	8 a.m. 1 p.m. 7 p.m.						
DRUG B: 1 pill once a day (a.m.)	8 a.m.						
DRUG C: 1 pill following meals	8 a.m. 1 p.m. 7 p.m.						

CONCLUSION

The ultimate safety and effectiveness of all medication rests with the user. Having good information about your medicine and taking it as instructed is the best way to avoid problems and receive the greatest possible benefit.

Medicine is not the solution to every problem. Talk with your doctor about alternative treatments or if your health problems can be treated by changes in diet, exercise, or stress level.

If you have been taking a medicine for a long time, ask your doctor to evaluate how well it is working and whether you still need to take it.

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