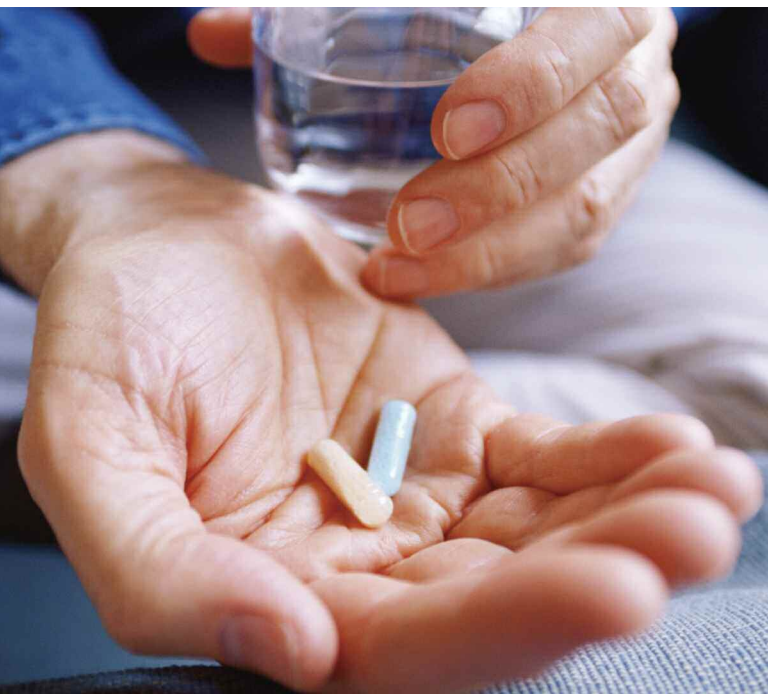


# Your Medicine: Be Smart. Be Safe.

Learn more about how to take medicines safely. Use the wallet card at the back of this booklet to keep track of your medicines.



**AHRQ**  
Agency for Healthcare  
Research and Quality  
Advancing Excellence  
in Health Care

**EDUCATE before  
YOU MEDICATE**  
National Council on Patient Information/ and Education  
[www.talkaboutx.org](http://www.talkaboutx.org)

The NCIIE  
Coalition-working  
together to promote  
safe medicine use

**Keep this booklet with your medicines and talk with your doctor\* if you have any questions, concerns, or worries.**

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

## **How to order copies of this booklet**

For up to 10 free copies of this booklet, e-mail the AHRQ Publications Clearinghouse at [AHRQPubs@ahrq.hhs.gov](mailto:AHRQPubs@ahrq.hhs.gov) or call 800-358-9295.

Larger quantities can be purchased from the NCPIE, which also offers more information about safe medicine use.

Visit its Web sites:

[www.talkaboutrx.org](http://www.talkaboutrx.org)

[www.bemedwise.org](http://www.bemedwise.org)

Or contact NCPIE:

National Council on Patient Information and Education

200-A Monroe Street, Suite 212

Rockville, MD 20850

Phone: 301-340-3940

Fax: 301-340-3944

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\*The term “doctor” is used in this booklet to refer to the person who helps you manage your health care.

# Your Medicine: Be Smart. Be Safe.

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 my medicine?
- Is it safe to take vitamins when I take a prescription medicine?
- Now that I feel better, can I stop taking this medicine?

Medicine is prescribed to help you. But it can hurt if you take too much or mix medicines that don't go together. Many people have problems each year, some serious, because of taking the wrong medicine or not taking the right medicines correctly.

You can help yourself get the best results by being a part of your “health care team.” Your health care team includes:

- The doctor, physician assistant, nurse practitioner, or other professionals who prescribe your medicine or are in charge of your care.
- A nurse who helps you at home, a doctor's office, or a hospital.
- The pharmacist who fills your prescription and can answer questions about your medicines.



# Four Ways to Be Smart and Safe With Medicines

# 1

Give your health care team important information.

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

- ✓ Prescription medicines.
- ✓ Medicines you can buy without a prescription, such as aspirin, diet pills, antacids, laxatives, allergy medicine, and cough medicine.
- ✓ Vitamins, including multivitamins.
- ✓ Dietary or herbal supplements such as St. John's wort or ginkgo biloba.

*List them all on the wallet card in the back of this booklet.*

Be sure to tell your health care team:

- If you have allergies (including medicine-related allergies) or if you have had problems when taking a medicine.
- About other doctors or health professionals who have prescribed medicine for you or suggested that you take a vitamin or herbal supplement.

- If you are pregnant, may get pregnant, or are nursing.
- About any other illness or medical condition, like diabetes or high blood pressure.
- If cost is a concern. There may be another medicine that costs less and will work the same.



"I go to my regular doctor for most things, but sometimes I go to a specialist. No matter who I'm going to see, I always take my list of medicines with me and show it to the doctor."

# 2

## Get the facts about your medicine.

Ask questions about every new prescription medicine. Get the answers you need from your health care team before you take your medicine.

If your doctor writes your prescription by hand, make sure you can read it. If you can't read your doctor's handwriting, your pharmacist might not be able to either. If your doctor submits your prescription directly to the pharmacy, ask for a copy.

Ask your doctor to write down on the prescription why you need the medicine. . . for example, 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 doctor or pharmacist.
- Write questions down ahead of time and bring them to your appointment.

By asking questions now, you may prevent problems later.

## Questions to ask before you take your medicine:

1. Why am I taking this medicine? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What are the brand name and generic\* name of this medicine? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Can I take a generic version of this medicine? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Does this new prescription mean I should stop taking other medicines? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. How much of the medicine should I take and how often do I take it? If I need to take it three times a day, does that mean at breakfast, lunch, and dinner, or every 8 hours? Do I need to wake up in the middle of the night to take it? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*\*Learn more about generic medicine. See page 14.*



6. Do I need to take it all or should I stop when I feel better? \_\_\_\_\_

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7. How long will I take it? Can I get a refill? How often can I get a refill? \_\_\_\_\_

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8. How should I store my medication? Do I need to keep it in the refrigerator? \_\_\_\_\_

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9. Are there any tests I need while I'm on this medicine? \_\_\_\_\_

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10. When should the medicine start working? How can I tell if it's working? \_\_\_\_\_

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11. Are there foods, drinks (including alcohol), other medicines, or activities to avoid while I'm taking this medicine? \_\_\_\_\_

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12. What are the side effects? When should I tell the doctor about a problem or side effect?

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13. What should I do if I have a side effect?

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14. What happens if I miss a dose? \_\_\_\_\_

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15. What printed information can you give me about this medicine? \_\_\_\_\_

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## Tips:

- ✓ Write your questions down ahead of time. Keep a list of questions you want to ask your health care team. Take the list to your appointment.
- ✓ Be sure to write down what your health care team tells you about your medicine so you remember later.
- ✓ Bring a friend or family member with you when you visit the doctor. Talking over what to do with someone you trust can help you make better decisions.
- ✓ Try to use the same pharmacy so all your prescription records will be in one place.
- ✓ Read and save the information that comes with your medicine. It's often stapled to the bag from the pharmacy.
- ✓ Keep a list of all the medicines, vitamins, and dietary supplements or herbs you take. Add new medicines to the list when you start taking something new or when a dose changes. Show the list to your doctor and the pharmacist. Use the wallet card at the back of this booklet.

- ✓ Make a copy of your list. Keep one copy and give the other to a family member or friend.
- ✓ Store all medicines together in one designated location in a dry and cool place. The kitchen and the bathroom are bad places to store medicine because of heat and moisture.
- ✓ Make sure medicine does not freeze if you store it in the refrigerator.
- ✓ Throw away any medicine that has expired or that your doctor has discontinued. (Ask your doctor or pharmacist for advice on how to throw away your specific medication.)



# 3

## Stay with your treatment plan.

Now that you have the right medicine, you'll want to carry out the treatment plan. That's not always easy. 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 all of your medicine for as long as your doctor prescribed even if you feel better. If you don't finish, the infection could come back and be harder to treat.
- **Ask your doctor if your prescription needs to be refilled.** If you take medicine for high blood pressure or to lower your cholesterol, you may need your medicine for a long time.



"I want to make sure all my medicines are OK. So, once a year I call the pharmacist and make an appointment for her to check everything I take. I put all my medicines and vitamins in a bag. I even put in nonprescription medicines like antacids, pain relievers, and laxatives."

- If you are having side effects or other concerns, tell your doctor. You may be able to take a different amount or type of medicine.
- Your medicine was prescribed only for you. Never give your prescription medicine to anyone else or take prescription medicine that wasn't prescribed for you, even if you have the same medical condition.
- Ask whether you need blood tests, x-rays, or other tests to find out if the medicine is working, if it's causing any problems, and if you need a different medicine. Ask your doctor to tell you what the tests showed.



### **How can I keep track of my medicines?**

Many products can help remind you to take your medicine on time and keep track of how much to 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.

## Tips:

- You can get help:
  - ✓ At work, there may be a nurse on site.
  - ✓ At school, a nurse may be available to help your child take medicines on time and safely.
  - ✓ At home, a visiting nurse may be able to help.

### Friends and family can help by:

- Going with you to the doctor. Ask them to write down information about your medicines and treatment plan.
- Picking up your medicine. 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 have problems, let them know.
- Keeping a daily record of medicine you take and the time of day so you won't take it twice.

# 4

## Keep a record of your medicines.

Use the wallet card at the back of this booklet to keep track of your medicines, vitamins, herbs, and other dietary supplements.



### **What is a generic medicine?**

Generic drugs are safe, effective, and approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). They have the same dosage, safety, quality, performance, and strength as brand name drugs. The color or flavor of a generic medicine 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 that drug. Generic drugs usually cost less than brand name drugs.



## For more information

To learn about specific medicines go to [www.medlineplus.gov](http://www.medlineplus.gov) and click on “Drugs & Supplements.” If you don’t have Internet access, go to your local library for help.

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/consumer](http://www.ahrq.gov/consumer).

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



## List Your Doctors and Pharmacists Here:

Doctor \_\_\_\_\_

Contact information \_\_\_\_\_

Doctor \_\_\_\_\_

Contact information \_\_\_\_\_

Doctor \_\_\_\_\_

Contact information \_\_\_\_\_

Doctor \_\_\_\_\_

Contact information \_\_\_\_\_

Doctor \_\_\_\_\_

Contact information \_\_\_\_\_

Nurse \_\_\_\_\_

Contact information \_\_\_\_\_

Pharmacist \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number \_\_\_\_\_

24-hour Pharmacy \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number \_\_\_\_\_





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Coalition-working  
together to promote  
safe medicine use

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(Replaces AHRQ Pub. No. 03-0019)  
April 2011

## Nonprescription medicines

- Cold or cough medicines
- Aspirin or other pain relievers
- Allergy relief medicines
- Antacids
- Sleeping pills
- Laxatives
- Diet pills
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

Medicines I should not take because of bad reactions or allergies \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Vitamins, herbals, and supplements

- Vitamins (type) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Glucosamine chondroitin
- St. John's wort
- Ginkgo biloba
- Ginseng
- Other \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Medicine Wallet Card

Show this card to your doctor or pharmacist. To print more copies, visit [www.ahrq.gov](http://www.ahrq.gov) and type "Your Medicine" in the search box.

My name \_\_\_\_\_

Contact information \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Prescription Medicines

Name and how much medicine (example) Tetracycline 250 mg	Color	What it is for
	White	Respiratory infection

Fold Here

Date began taking	How much to take and when	Do not take with
2/8/2011	1 tablet 4 times a day 9 a.m., 1 p.m., 5 p.m., 9 p.m.	Antacids or dairy products

Fold Here

Blood type \_\_\_\_\_

Medical condition(s) \_\_\_\_\_

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## Emergency Contact

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Home phone \_\_\_\_\_

Work phone \_\_\_\_\_

Cell phone \_\_\_\_\_