

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.

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

Doctor _____

Phone _____

Doctor _____

Phone _____

Doctor _____

Phone _____

Nurse _____

Phone _____

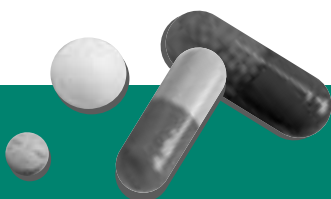
Pharmacist _____

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).



Your Medicine: Play It 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 my vitamins when I am taking a prescription medicine?
- Now that I feel better, can I stop taking my medicine?

Let's face it. Medicine is prescribed to help you. But 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, because of taking the wrong medicine or not taking the right medicines correctly.

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 important information

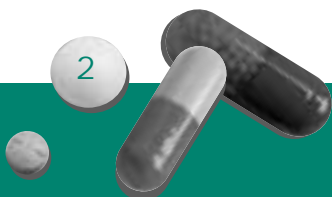
Be a partner with your health care team.
Tell them about:

- 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 them all on the form in the back of this booklet.

Also be sure to tell your health care team:

- If you have medicine allergies or if you have had problems when taking a medicine before.
- About any other doctors or health care 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 a baby.
- About any other illness or medical condition you have, 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 the questions listed on the next page 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 to the pharmacy electronically, ask for a copy of the prescription.

Ask your doctor 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 doctor or pharmacist.
- Write questions down ahead of time and bring them to your appointment.

By taking the time to ask questions now, you may be preventing problems later.



Questions to ask before you take your medicine:

1. What are the brand name and generic* name of this medicine? _____

2. Can I take a generic version of this medicine? _____

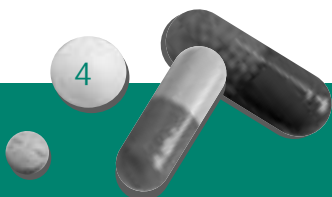
3. What am I taking this medicine for?

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

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

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

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



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

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

10. When should I tell the doctor about a problem or side effect? _____

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

12. What are the side effects that can happen with this medicine?

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

14. What happens if I miss a dose?

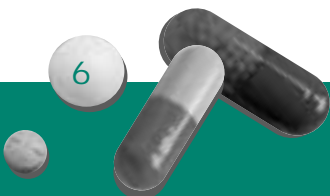
15. What printed information can you give me about this medicine?

**Learn more about generic medicine. See page 10.*



Tips!

- Write your questions down ahead of time. Keep a list of questions you want to ask your health care team. Take the list with you to your appointment.
- Take notes when you get information from your health care team.
- 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 to buy 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 medicines, vitamins, and dietary supplements you take. Be sure to add new medicines to the list when you start taking something new or when you change your dose. Show the list to your doctor and pharmacist. Use the list at the back of this booklet.
- Make a copy of your list. Keep one copy and give the other to a friend or loved one.



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 all of your medicine for as many days as your doctor prescribed, even if you feel better.
- Ask your doctor 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 your medicine for a long time.



I want to make sure all my medicines are OK. So 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.



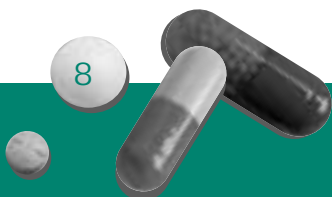
- If you are having side effects or other concerns, tell your doctor. You may be able to take a different amount or type of medicine.
- Your medicine was prescribed only for you. Never give your prescription medicine to somebody else or take prescription medicine that wasn't prescribed for you, even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

What products can help me keep track of my medicines?



Many products can help remind you to take your medicine 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.



Tips!

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

Friends and family can help by:

- Going with you to the doctor. 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 what medicine you take so you won’t take it twice.



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.

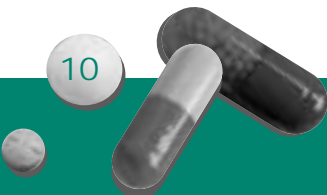
What is a generic medicine?



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 of a generic medicine may be different from the brand-name drug, 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 because their manufacturers didn't pay for the development costs of the medicine.



For more information

To learn about specific medicines, if you have Internet access, go to www.medlineplus.gov and click on “Drug Information.” If you do not have Internet access, ask your local librarian 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 its Web site at www.ahrq.gov.

How to order copies of this booklet

For a free booklet (up to 10 free copies), e-mail the AHRQ Publications Clearinghouse at ahrqpubs@ahrq.gov or call their toll-free number: 800-358-9295.

Larger quantities can be purchased from the National Council on Patient Information and Education (NCPIE), which may have bulk discounts available. NCPIE also offers information about other resources for learning about safe medicine use. Visit its Web sites: www.talkaboutrx.org and www.bemedwise.org.

Or contact them at:
NCPIE
4915 Saint Elmo Avenue, Suite 505
Bethesda, MD 20814-6082
Phone: 301-656-8565
Fax: 301-656-4464

NCPIE does not supervise or endorse the activities of any group or professional. Discussion and action concerning medicines are solely the responsibility of patients and their health care professionals, and not NCPIE.





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National Council on Patient
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Nonprescription medicines

- 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 _____

Vitamins, herbals, and supplements

- Vitamins (type) _____
- _____
- _____
- Glucosamine chondroitin _____
- St. John's Wort _____
- Ginkgo biloba _____
- Ginseng _____
- Other _____

Medicine Record Form

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 go to the doctor or pharmacist.

Name _____

Home phone _____

Work phone _____

Cell phone _____

Prescription Medicines

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

FOLD HERE

Date began taking	How much to take and when	Do not take with
2/8/2003	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 conditions _____

Emergency Contact

Name _____

Home phone number _____

Work phone number _____

Cell phone number _____