

Using Medicines Safely

It is important that you use medicines carefully. Even common over-the-counter medication can cause problems if it is not used correctly. If you are ever unsure about how to take a medication talk to your health care provider.

Over-the-Counter Drugs: Read the Labels

Over-the-counter drugs are medications you can buy without a prescription at the drugstore or supermarket.

Always read the bottle or box before using the medicine. It will tell you:

- How much to give of the medication and how often to give it
- What is in the medication
- Warning signs about using the medication
- If the medication is safe for children or pregnant women
- The expiration date

If no dose is given for children under 12 years old, ask the pharmacist or your health care provide if it is okay to give the medicine to your child and if yes, how much medicine and when it should be given.

Prescription Medication: Ask Questions

Bring a list of all the medications or bring all the medications you are taking with you when you see your health care provider. That way, if your health provider prescribes you a new medication you can ask if it is okay to take it with everything you are already taking. Also let your provider know if you are pregnant, nursing or have ever had any bad reactions to medication.

You should ask your health care provider these questions about any new prescriptions:

- What is the medication?
- Will the medication cause a problem with other drugs I'm taking?
- Why should it be given?
- When should it be given?
- How much should be given?
- How long should it be given? Should I stop taking the medicine when I feel better?
- What should I do if I forget to take a dose?
- How soon will the medication work?
- What side effects does the medication have? What should I do if I get these side effects?
- Is there a less expensive medication I can use?

Measuring Medication

Use the measuring tools included with the medication, not kitchen measuring spoons or cups. Liquid medicines come with a cup, spoon or syringe to measure the right dose.

If you can drink from a cup

Dosage cups

- Look closely at the numbers on the side of the cup
- Put the cup on a flat surface
- Measure out the medicine at eye level

Dosing spoons

- Measure the liquid in the spoon at eye level
- Sip the medicine from the spoon

If you can't drink from a cup

Droppers

- Put medication into the dropper and measure at eye level

Syringes

- Remove cap if there is one
- Squirt into back of your mouth

Possible Complications

Some foods and drinks can make your medicine work too fast or too slow, or change the way your medicine works. For this reason it is important that you tell your provider if you are taking any types of herbs or natural supplements. It is also important with many medications to avoid drinking alcohol.

Ask your provider for a list of foods, drinks, herbs, and supplements to avoid with the specific medication you are taking.