

# Managing Your Prescriptions

## *Your Medicine: How to Get the Most Benefits with the Fewest Risks*

The single most important way you can stay healthy is to be an active member of your own health care team. One way to get high-quality health care is to find and use information and take an active role in all of the decisions made about your care. Understanding the importance your medication plays in your treatment will help you get the most benefit from your prescription. It is important to take an active role in your healthcare by working with your doctor, nurse, and pharmacist to learn as much as possible about your prescription.

The best way to reduce your risk of experiencing a medication error is to know exactly what you're taking. Ask your doctor or pharmacist to provide the information you need to ensure your new medication is as safe and effective as possible. If you don't completely understand what you're told, ask again.

Preventable medication errors harm 1.5 million Americans and cost billions of dollars each year, according to a study by the Institute of Medicine. The problem is real. You have an important role in preventing errors in the care you receive.

### **When you are prescribed a medication, ask your doctor the following questions:**

- What's the name of the medication?
- What is it going to treat?
- Is it okay to substitute a less-expensive generic medicine for the name brand? Will it achieve the same effect?
- How much should I take, how often, and for how long?
- What side effects could I experience, and what should I do if they occur?
- When should I expect the medication to work and how can I tell if it is working?

### **Know the answers to these questions about your medication:**

- How should I take it?
- What do I do if I miss a dose?
- Should I avoid any foods, beverages, other medications, or activities while taking the medication?
- Do I need lab tests to check how the medicine is working or to make sure it doesn't cause harmful side effects?
- How many refills of this prescription can I get?
- Is the medication covered by my prescription drug plan? Does this medication require preauthorization and/or that the medication be obtained from a specific pharmacy?



### **What your doctor needs to know:**

- Remind your doctor (and pharmacist) if you have any allergies or have had an adverse or unexpected reaction to a medication. Provide details of what you experienced.
- Give your doctor a list of all prescriptions and nonprescription medicines, vitamins, and supplements you currently take. If you don't have a list, take them all in a bag. Ask your doctor for a list of your current medications that you can carry with you.

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**When you receive your medicine from the pharmacy, check to be sure it is the medicine you were prescribed by your doctor:**

- Does the medicine seem different than what your doctor wrote on the prescription or look different than what you expected?
- Does a refill look like it is a different shape, color, size, smell, appearance or number of pills than what you were given before?
- Is the reason you are taking the medication or the directions different than what your doctor told you? If something seems wrong, ask the pharmacist to double-check it.

**Steps to take for safety's sake:**

- Read and understand all forms before you sign them.
- Don't change the dosage or stop taking your prescribed medication without first consulting your doctor; always follow instructions for taking medications.
- Don't take medicine prescribed for another person, and don't give your medications away.
- Store medications as directed in the original containers.

**During your medication therapy, you may need to schedule a follow-up visit with your doctor to monitor your progress. Make sure to tell him or her:**

- About any problems you are having with your prescription.
- About any side effects or problems you have had since starting to take the prescription.
- About any new prescriptions that another doctor may have given you and any over-the-counter medicines that you started taking since your last doctor's visit.
- How you are feeling since starting the medication.

**Remember to check with your insurance plan to:**

- Confirm prescription benefit coverage, out-of-pocket costs (deductibles and copayments) and any dollar limit.
- Inquire about reduced costs with 90 - day pricing, generic alternatives, and convenient mail-order home delivery service.
- Get pre-authorization, if needed.



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