

Using Medications - Becoming a More Informed Patient

Medication errors can happen in a variety of settings, but most occur in a doctor's office, pharmacy, hospital or at home. Although some medication errors result only in inconvenience or discomfort and may go undetected, in the worst cases, medication errors can cause serious health problems or even death.

Being better informed about your prescription medications will help you get the most benefit from them and will help prevent medication errors.

Getting Started: Know Your Medical History

A good place to start on the road to being an informed patient is to become familiar with your own medical history and the highlights of your family's medical history.

Create a list of the medicines you take as well as information about surgeries, vaccinations, and allergies, and share this with any healthcare professional you visit so that he or she can develop the best possible treatment plan for you.

Also, document important information from your family's medical history. Include information about close relatives who have or had conditions such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, addictions or intolerances.

Using a [personal medical log book](#) can help keep all of this important information in one place.

Talk to Your Doctor and Other Healthcare Professionals

Tell your doctor and other healthcare professionals about any changes in your daily life, including an increase/decrease in sleep, a special diet or changes in schedule.

You should also inform your healthcare professionals of the following:

- Any allergies to medications, or if you suspect you have previously experienced an adverse or allergic reaction to a particular medicine
- If you are currently pregnant, have plans to become pregnant, or if you are nursing a baby
- Illnesses or problems for which another doctor or healthcare professional is currently treating or has recently treated you

Ask About Side Effects

A side effect or adverse reaction is an unwanted effect of a medication or therapy that occurs in addition to its intended effect. Some side effects are more predictable. Known and common side effects are listed in the printed information that comes with every drug.

Some adverse reactions occur unexpectedly, some may be serious and some cannot be predicted. Serious adverse reactions are generally rare. The causes of

adverse reactions include medication errors, such as overdose, interactions between drugs, or interactions between drugs and certain foods. Call your doctor, pharmacist or other healthcare professional immediately if you think you have experienced an adverse reaction to a medication.

Your doctor, pharmacist or other healthcare professional can help you anticipate, understand and deal with side effects. Ask them any questions or discuss any concerns you have about your medications.

Most pharmaceutical companies provide information about their products on Web sites. The Ortho-McNeil Neurologics, Division of Ortho-McNeil-Janssen Pharmaceuticals, Inc. , Web site offers fact sheets and complete prescribing information about all of its products.

Follow Prescription Directions

Always take medications as instructed by your doctor, pharmacist or other healthcare professional, and do not change the way you take them unless instructed by them to do so.

With certain medications, some precautions are especially important. For example, if a medication can cause drowsiness, you should not drive a car or operate heavy machinery while taking it. Other medications may require you to avoid certain foods or ingredients, such as alcohol or caffeine. If you are going to travel, find out if your medication can be used in different climates and if any adjustments are needed for changing time zones.

If you are a caregiver for a child or another adult, you may have to remind him or her to take a medication, or you may need to administer it yourself. If your child goes to school, contact the school nurse for help in making sure your child's medicine is taken on time and safely.

Monitor Your Reactions

Side effects of prescription medicines can be due to many possible causes. If you experience unusual symptoms that begin after you start taking a new medication, contact your doctor, pharmacist or other healthcare professional **immediately**. It is important to determine if a symptom was drug-related and whether or not you should continue taking the medicine.

In addition, for each medication, you should learn to recognize the signs of overdose and whether you should call a poison control center or another emergency number in the event that you or a family member experiences an overdose.

Source of Information: <http://rxforsafety.com>