

What you can do to take your medications safely.

Medication safety means taking the right medication, at the right time and in the right way. Doing so can improve health and save lives.

Here are some ways you can help avoid mistakes with your medications:

At the Doctor's Office

- **Know why you are taking each medication.** Also, find out how long you need to take it.
- **Talk with your doctor or nurse about each medication.** Learn the dosage (how much you take), directions (how to take it) and what to do if you forget to take your medication. Also, ask about any side effects and what to do if they occur.
- **Tell your doctor about all the medications you take.** This includes prescription drugs, vitamins, and other natural remedies such as herbal products.
- **Make sure that you can read all prescriptions the doctor writes for you.**

At the Pharmacy

- **Use the same pharmacy each time.** This way, the staff gets to know you and your health care needs.
- **Give your pharmacist needed information.** This includes your insurance card, if you have one, and your phone number. It also includes a list of any drug allergies and a list of all the medications (prescription and non-prescription), vitamins, and natural remedies (if any) that you take.
- **Make sure you get the correct medication.** Read the label on the pill bottle to make sure that the instructions and dosage are the same as your doctor ordered.
- **Ask for written information about each medication.**

At Home

- **Take your medication only as prescribed.** This means not taking more or less than the doctor ordered. And never take someone else's medication.
- **Be aware of any side effects or bad reactions (such as dizziness or nausea).** Call your doctor or pharmacy if you do not feel well.

- **Keep all medication in the original pill bottle or package.** Store in a cool dry space, and be sure to keep all medication out of the reach of children.
- **Pay attention to expiration (use by) dates on the pill bottle.** Do not wait until the last minute to refill your prescription. Throw out medications that are past their expiration date.
- **Make a complete, up-to-date list of your medications.** Keep copies at home and in your wallet, and think about giving a copy to a family member or close friend.

In the Hospital

- **Let the hospital staff know about all the medications you take.** You can do this with a written list of your medications. Or you can bring all your medications (in their original bottles or packages) to the hospital with you.
- **Talk with your doctor or nurse about all new medications.** For each, ask how to take it and why you need it.
- **Tell your nurse if you think you are not getting medication on time.** Also, speak up if you think you are getting the wrong pill.
- **Before you leave the hospital, ask for a list of all medications you need to take at home.** Make sure you know how to safely take each of them.

Where to Learn More about Medication Safety

Massachusetts Coalition for the Prevention of Medical Errors
(This site has a medication list form that you can fill out.)

<http://www.macoalition.org>

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

www.ahrq.gov/consumer/safemeds/safemeds.htm

The Joint Commission

www.jointcommission.org/patientsafety/speakup/speak_up_med_mistakes.htm

Institute for Safe Medication Practices

www.ismp.org/newsletters/consumer/consumeralerts.asp