

## **How to Get the Most from Your Medicine**

If you have heart problems or other health problems, you're probably taking at least a couple of prescription medicines. Keeping track of these medicines can be confusing. But you need to know the facts about your medicines so you can get the most benefit from them. Here are some tips on how to use your medicines correctly.

### **What questions should I ask my doctor about my medicine?**

If there is something you don't understand about a medicine you are taking, ask your doctor. If you still don't understand, ask your doctor to explain things more clearly. The following is a list of questions you can ask your doctor to help you learn how to use your medicine correctly and safely:

- What does the medicine do?
- When and how should I take the medicine?
- What side effects (reactions your body may have to the medicine) could I have?
- Will my medicine react to any other medicines, foods or drinks?
- Should I avoid any activities while I'm taking this medicine?
- What should I do if I forget to take my medicine?
- How will I know if the medicine is working?

### **How do I remind myself to take my medicine?**

If you are taking several medicines, you and your doctor or pharmacist should make a schedule that shows when to take your medicine and how much to take. Then, try to take your medicine at the same time (or times) every day, such as when you wake up or with meals. Keep the medicine bottle(s) in a place you see often, such as on a kitchen counter. (Make sure that medicines are in childproof containers and kept out of the reach of children.)

### **Medicine dos and don'ts**

- Do read the label carefully.
- Do take your medicine exactly as your doctor tells you to.
- Do make sure that each of your doctors (if you see more than one) has a list of all of the medicines you're taking.
- Do ask your doctor to help to make a schedule so you know what medicines to take at what times of the day.
- Do consider using one pharmacy for all your prescriptions. The pharmacist can help you keep track of what you're taking.
- Do make sure your family or roommate knows what medicine you're taking and when you're supposed to take it.
- Don't combine prescription medicines and over-the-counter medicines unless your doctor says it's okay.
- Don't stop taking a medicine or change how much or how often you take it without first talking to your doctor.
- Don't take someone else's medicine.

### **How can I keep track of what I'm taking?**

You can buy pillboxes that have compartments for each day of the week. They are available at drugstores and pharmacies. At the beginning of the week, put the pills you're supposed to take each day in a separate compartment. If you take several pills at different times every day, buy a pillbox with more compartments and separate them by time and day of the week.

Keep track of the name and amount you take of each medicine. Read the label and any package instructions or inserts carefully. Find out what the pills look like and become familiar with their colors or shapes so you don't take the wrong pill by mistake.

### **Things to know about each medicine you take**

- Name (generic name and brand name)
- Reason for taking it
- How much to take and how often to take it
- Possible side effects and what to do if you have them
- How long you should take it
- Special instructions (taking it at bedtime or with meals, etc.)

### **What if I don't feel better even though I'm taking my medicine correctly?**

Your medicine needs time to work. Ask your doctor how long it should take for the medicine to make you feel better. It might take time to find the best medicine for you and the best amount of it. Call your doctor if you have concerns about what you're taking or if you don't feel better after taking your medicine as prescribed.

### **Can I take nonprescription medicines?**

Don't take an over-the-counter medicine (one you can buy without a prescription, such as aspirin) without checking with your doctor first. Some over-the-counter medicines react with prescription medicines. This is called a drug interaction.

### **Should I avoid any foods, drinks, or activities while I'm taking medicine?**

Talk to your doctor about things to avoid while you are taking a prescription medicine. Some foods can cause you to have side effects, such as stomach upset, while you are taking medicine. Drinking alcohol is generally not a good idea while you are taking medicine. Some medicines cause reactions such as sun sensitivity (getting a sunburn or sun rash), so you may have to limit your outdoor activities or take precautions to protect your skin from the sun.

### ***For more information***

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