

What You Need to Know from Your Doctor or Pharmacist

Communication and information sharing is a two-way street. You need to be informed about the medications you're being prescribed by your doctor or given to you by a pharmacist.

Be sure to ask:

- What is the name of the drug?
- What is it used for?
- How often and for how long should it be taken? What should be done if a dose is missed?
- Are there foods or other medications that should not be taken with this medicine? What about alcohol consumption?
- What are the possible side effects? And which side effects should be reported to your doctor?

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Medication **Safety**

Understanding the risks and benefits of medication, as well as information you and your doctor need to know.



Medications play a big role in healthcare, helping people to stay healthy, and live longer. Therefore, it's important to know how to use them safely and effectively.

Medication Types

Marked with 'Rx', *prescription drugs* may only be used and purchased under a doctor's supervision, and with a written script.

Over-the-counter (or 'OTC') medications are those available without a prescription. They include aspirin, other pain medications like Tylenol® or Aleve®, cold preparations, antacids, vitamins and all herbal and dietary supplements.

Risks and Benefits

While medications are used to treat or manage many diseases and health conditions like arthritis, diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease, it's important to remember that both prescription and over-the-counter medications can have potentially serious side effects. This is especially true when medications are used in combination, or with alcohol.

Avoiding Overmedication

As they say, 'all things in moderation.' The following will help you to avoid overmedication:

- Stop taking a medication after your doctor replaces it with a new one
- Do not take a medication prescribed for someone else
- Only take the prescribed amount of a medication
- If you see more than one doctor, make sure to give each of them a complete, up-to-date list of the medications you are taking.

All patients should keep a current list of their medications to show their doctor at each visit.

Remember to always follow the doctor and pharmacist's instructions for frequency and dose, how to store the medication, or whether to take it with food or on an empty stomach.

What Your Doctor Needs to Know

In order to make a proper diagnosis and appropriately prescribe medication, your doctor needs information. Be prepared with answers to the following questions when you call or visit your doctor:

Symptoms

What are they? When did they start? How long have they lasted? Have they changed over time? Have you had similar symptoms before? If so, when? What was the diagnosis at that time?

Medications

What prescription medications are you currently taking? What over-the-counter drugs are you taking?

Current health problems

What chronic disease or health problems do you have?

Allergies and reactions

What medications are you allergic to? What happens when you take those drugs? What medications have caused side effects in the past?