

6 Tips to Avoid Medication Mistakes



1. Find out the name of your medication. Rather than simply letting your doctor write a prescription and send you on your way, be sure to ask the name of the medication. "This way you'll notice if the pharmacy gives you something different," says Cynthia Fitzpatrick, BSN, a registered nurse and a consumer safety officer in FDA's Center for Drug Evaluation and Research. "Also, every time you receive a refill, look at the medication before you leave the pharmacy to make sure it looks the same as what you had before. Is it the same color, size, shape, and texture? Is the packaging the same? If anything about the medication seems different, ask the pharmacist about it."

2. Ask questions about how to use the medication. "It's important to choose a doctor and pharmacist that you feel comfortable with so that you can freely ask questions," Fitzpatrick says. Some good questions to ask: What should I do if I forget a dose? Should I take this medication before, during, or after meals? What should the timing be between each dose? What side effects might I have? When should I contact my doctor or pharmacist if I experience certain side effects? Are there any other medications, food, or activities that I should avoid while using this medication? Should the medication be stored in the refrigerator or at room temperature? Take

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notes or ask your doctor to write down instructions or other information that is important to know about your medication or condition to help you remember.

3. Know what your medication is for. Stephen Setter, Pharm.D., associate professor of pharmacotherapy at Washington State University in Spokane, says one of his patients mistakenly thought her glaucoma medication was for treating headaches. "So she was taking her eye medication only when she had a headache, but she should have been taking it every day to treat her eye disease," Setter says. It's important to understand your medication because you are more likely to use it correctly, more likely to know what to expect from the medication, and better able to report what you are using and problems to your doctors and pharmacist.

4. Read medicine labels and follow directions. Before you use any medication, you should know when to use it, how much to use, and how long to use it. Be sure to read the medication label every time. In the middle of the night, you could accidentally put drops for your ears into your eyes or give your older child's medicine to the baby if you're not careful about checking the label. "Use the measuring device that comes with the medicine," suggests Fitzpatrick. "If you don't have a medicine device for measuring your liquid medicine, ask for one at the pharmacy." Also, read the patient medication information that comes with your prescription thoroughly before using your medication.

5. Keep all of your health care providers informed about your medications and dietary supplements (including vitamins and herbals). Make it a habit of showing your list of medications to all your health care professionals at every visit to the doctor, the pharmacy,

New Computerized Medication Box

On June 21, 2007, FDA cleared for marketing the Electronic Medication Management Assistant (EMMA), a programmable device that stores and dispenses prescription medication for patients' use in the home. EMMA is manufactured by INRange Systems based in Altoona, Pa.

EMMA consists of a medication delivery unit and two-way communication software that allows a health care professional to remotely manage prescriptions stored and released by the patient-operated delivery unit. The delivery unit is about the size of a bread box and plugs into a standard power outlet.

This computerized medication box stores prescription medications, emits an audible alert to the patient when medications are scheduled to be taken, and releases them onto a delivery tray when activated by the patient at the appropriate time. It uses a Web-based application for a health care professional to remotely schedule or adjust a patient's medications, and provides a history of each time patients access their medications.

and the hospital. Include on the list all your prescription and over-the-counter medications, and dietary supplements, including vitamins and herbals. Keeping all of your health care professionals informed about everything that you use will help ensure that you do not use two medicines with the same active ingredient or use anything that will interact with something else you are using. You can keep your health care professionals informed about your medications and dietary supplements with "My Medicine Record," a list in chart form developed by FDA. "My Medicine Record" can be found at: www.fda.gov/cder/consumerinfo/my_medicine_record.htm

Some doctors work with their patients to do a "brown bag checkup." This involves putting all of your prescription and over-the-counter medications into a paper bag and bringing them into your doctor's office to be checked by your doctor. Include your dietary supplements and herbals too. "This should be done every year and preferably more often," says Douglas Paauw, M.D., professor of medicine at the University of Washington in Seattle. "Some of my patients do it at every visit."

6. Keep the list of your medications with you at all times and let a loved one know. Keep a list of your medications and dietary supplements with you at all times, such as in your wallet or purse, and keep a copy in your home. Share a copy of the medication list with a family member or friend, or let them know where you keep the list. In an emergency, that person will be able to inform your doctors of the medications and dietary supplements you use. [FDA](#)

For More Information

Be an Active Member of Your Health Care Team
www.fda.gov/cder/consumerinfo/active12panelEng.htm

What You Need to Know to Use Medicine Safely
www.fda.gov/cder/consumerinfo/DPAdefault.htm

Information for Consumers on Using Over-the-Counter Medicines Safely
www.fda.gov/cder/medsinmyhome/MIMH_consumers.htm