

GETTING THE MOST FROM YOUR MEDICINE

Take Time Out for Safety

The good news: Never before have Americans been able to choose from so many medicines to improve their health. Indeed, the number of prescription drugs on the market has reached an all-time high. And thanks to the rapid rate of pharmaceutical discoveries, new drugs are continually being developed to address an ever-expanding number of conditions.

Three out of four visits to the doctor now result in prescriptions. And the number of prescriptions is expected to increase as the baby boomer population ages to remedy illnesses and enhance their quality of life. In addition, more and more consumers are self-medicating with over-the-counter products and dietary supplements; thus increasing their risks for adverse interactions.

The bad news: All of these trends add to the risks patients confront when they use medicines. With increased medication use, the chance for harmful drug-drug interactions grows significantly. And the risks are further magnified by the fact that an estimated 30% - 50% of people who currently use medicines do not take them correctly.

If you are one of these people, your medicines may be less effective at a minimum. In the worst cases, improper medicine use can cause hospitalization or even death.

Women, in particular, need to know how to use medicines wisely. They often manage medications for their whole family, and women over 45 use more medication than any other group.

The problem is, many women are so busy with family, community and job responsibilities that they do not take time to care for themselves. Fortunately, you need only a minute to learn how to use medicines wisely. Just remember:

1. Read the label
2. Avoid problems, such as side effects
3. Ask questions of your doctor, pharmacist or nurse
4. Keep a record of the medicines you use

These four messages are the focus of a massive public awareness campaign from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's Office of Women's Health entitled *Women's Health: Take Time To Care* (TTTC). Throughout October, the FDA will be reaching more than 5 million women and their families nationwide with the campaign.

To ensure TTTC reaches as many women as possible, the FDA is working closely with one of last year's pivotal partners—the National Association of Chain Drug Stores

(NACDS). In October 1999, more than 70 NACDS member chains are participating this year, representing over 20,000 outlets across the country.

FDA and NACDS are being aided by other national partners, including health and consumer organizations, women's groups, health care providers and health institutions. These partners are coordinating a broad range of local activities focused on safe medication use.

Even when the campaign is over, you can still find plenty of local resources to help you and your family use medicines wisely. We're living in the information age, and medicine information is more accessible than ever before. In fact, many pharmacies offer a toll-free number to call for specific medicine information.

Also, never hesitate to ask your doctor or pharmacist any questions you may have about your medication. How and when to take it—it's important to be clear about any dos and don'ts. For instance, if you see an advertisement for medicine that may be helpful, ask your doctor whether or not that medicine is right for you. And be sure to ask your pharmacist for a patient information leaflet when you pick up a new prescription.

In addition, look for the new, easy-to-read labels on all over-the-counter medications. Over time, the FDA will phase in these consumer-friendly labels that clearly indicate directions for use and any associated risks.

By learning how to use medicines wisely, you can reduce risks for you and your family and get the most out of today's growing selection of helpful medications.

Visit a pharmacy in October to pick up a free copy of the "My Medicines" brochure. The brochure is also available on the FDA Office of Women's Health Web site at www.fda.gov/womens/. Or, consumers can order 1 - 500 copies of the "My Medicines" brochure in English or Spanish by calling 1-888-8PUEBLO or writing to: Take Time to Care // Pueblo, CO 81009.