

Know Your Prescription and Nonprescription Medications

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Most people take a prescription or nonprescription medication from time to time. Consider these questions and answers for safety and effectiveness.

How do I know how long to take my medications?

Often, the type of medication you are taking determines the length of time it should be used. These are the three types of prescription medications:

Chronic: those you take for greater than one year or lifelong. Examples include heart, blood pressure, diabetes and cholesterol medications.

Short-term: those you take for a few weeks or less than one year. An example is an antibiotic.

As needed: those you take as needed, which may be short- or long-term. Examples include ointments, creams, sleep aids and pain relievers.

What should I look for when buying nonprescription medications?

If purchasing a nonprescription medication, read the label and treat only the symptoms you are experiencing.

Active ingredients: Contents and their purpose

Uses: Problems treated

Warnings: When to avoid

Directions: How to dose safely

Test Your Knowledge: How much do you know about drug-food interactions?

Match the following drug with the corresponding food interaction.

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. ___ Simvastatin
(cholesterol medication) | A. Leafy green vegetables |
| 2. ___ Levothyroxine
(thyroid medication) | B. Grapefruit/
grapefruit juice |
| 3. ___ Warfarin
(blood clot prevention medication) | C. Milk or calcium-containing products |

Answers: 1. B; 2. C; 3. A.

What questions should I ask my pharmacist?

Is the product safe for use along with my other medications?

How much and how often should I take it?

How do I know if it is working?

What side effects should I look for?

Is the product safe and effective for use?

Is this a reputable and safe manufacturer?

Do I need to take this medication with food?

- "Take with food" means to take your medication right before eating, with a meal or right after eating.
- "Take on an empty stomach" means to take your medication two hours before or after eating.



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Aim for adherence

Consider using one or more of these tools to be sure you take your medications as directed.

- Phone alarm – a recurring scheduled reminder
- Calendar – mark off each day after medication is taken
- Pill box – organized by day and time
- Timer cap – shows last time bottle was opened
- PillPack – packaged by time of administration
- Medsync – ready on same date

Do you know the foods that can interact with medications?

Some foods may cause your medication to be less effective, toxic or useless. Read the label to learn more. These are a few examples.

- Grapefruit or grapefruit juice: cholesterol medication, oral contraceptives
- Calcium-containing products: antibiotics, thyroid medications
- Caffeine: asthma, antibiotics
- Dark green leafy vegetables: blood thinners such as warfarin
- Alcohol/opioids: antibiotics; anxiety, depression, allergy or sleep medications

How do I use painkillers appropriately?

Prescription opioids (oxycodone, codeine, morphine, tramadol, fentanyl) can have side effects such as drowsiness, constipation/urine retention, nausea, confusion, decreased heart rate/blood pressure and shallow breathing. They increase the risk for falls among older adults. Ask about Narcan when picking up an opioid prescription from the pharmacy.

Non-Opioid options for pain management include over-the-counter medications such as Tylenol, Aspirin, Advil, Aleve and Voltaren Gel.



How should I store medications?

Excess, expired or unwanted medications should be disposed of as soon as possible. Unwanted medications may lead to unintentional poisonings, misuse or abuse by others, and environmental contamination.

- Store according to directions. Refrigerate if needed (for example, insulin).
- Keep your meds in the original packaging.
- Avoid extreme temperatures.
- Keep away from children.
- Use a locked medication dispenser.

NDAassistive.org is a local resource that offers/recommends various medication management systems. Check them out!

How should I dispose of medications?

- Ask about medication disposal or take-back programs at your local pharmacy.
- Call your local pharmacy or police department.
- Consider a service such as Deterra or DisposeRx.
- If these options are not available, mix the meds in water and sand, kitty litter or coffee grounds so no one will consume them. Place in spillproof container and discard.

Medication- and/or Nutrition-related Websites to Explore

These websites provide free evidence-based information:

www.fda.gov/drugs/resources-drugs/information-consumers-and-patients-drugs - The Food and Drug Administration website provides information for consumers on medication safety, disposal, purchasing and other educational resources.

www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus - The Medline Plus website (National Institutes of Health) provides helpful information on health topics and medications.

www.MyPlate.gov - Based on the U.S. Dietary Guidelines for Americans, the MyPlate website provides nutrition information and ways to assess and track your diet for nutritional adequacy.

<http://ods.od.nih.gov> - The Office of Dietary Supplements (National Institutes of Health) provides the latest information about dietary supplements based on research. It provides many user-friendly fact sheets.

Ask your pharmacist for more information about medications. See a nutrition professional for more information about food and health.

This project is supported by the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

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