

Four Ways To Play It Safe With Medicines

1. Give Your Healthcare Team Important Information

Be a partner with your healthcare team. Tell them about all the medicines, vitamins, herbals and dietary supplements you're already taking. This includes:

- **Prescription medicines.**
- **Medicines you can buy without a prescription**, such as aspirin, antacids, laxatives and cough medicine.
- **Vitamins and dietary supplements**, such as St. John's Wort or ginkgo biloba.

Also be sure to tell your healthcare team:

- If you have medicine allergies or if you have had problems when taking a medicine previously.
- About any other doctors or healthcare professionals who have prescribed medicine for you or suggested you take a vitamin or herbal supplement.
- If you are pregnant, may get pregnant or are nursing a baby.
- About any other illness or medical condition you have, like diabetes or high blood pressure.
- About any cost concerns. There may be another medicine that costs less and will work the same.

2. Get the Facts About Your Medicine

Be Informed

Ask questions about every new prescription medicine. Get the answers you need from your healthcare team before you take your medicine.

Read the Prescription

If your doctor writes your prescription by hand, make sure you can read it. If you can't read your doctor's handwriting, your pharmacist might not be able to either.

Know What Your Medicine Is For

Ask your doctor to write down on the prescription what the medicine is for — not just "Take once a day," for example, but "Take once a day for high blood pressure."

Ask Questions

If you have other questions or concerns:

- Talk to your doctor or pharmacist.
- Write questions down ahead of time and bring them to your appointment.

By taking the time to ask questions now, you may be preventing problems later.

3. Stay With Your Treatment Plan

Now that you have the right medicine, you'll want to carry out the treatment plan. But that's not always easy. The medicines may cause side effects. Or you may feel better and want to stop before finishing your medicines.

- **Take all the antibiotics** your doctor prescribed. If you are taking an antibiotic to fight an infection, it is very important to take all of your medicine for as many days as your doctor prescribed, even if you feel better.
- **Ask your doctor if your prescription needs a refill.** If you are taking medicine for high blood pressure or to lower your cholesterol, you may be using your medicine for a long time.
- If you are having **side effects** or other concerns, tell your doctor. You may be able to take a different amount or type of medicine.
- Your doctor prescribed your medicine for you only. **Never give your prescription medicine to somebody else** or take prescription medicine that wasn't prescribed for you, even if you have the same medical condition.
- Ask whether you need blood tests, x-rays or other **lab tests** to find out if the medicine is working, to find out if it's causing any problems and to see if you need a different medicine. Ask your doctor to tell you what the tests showed.

4. Keep a Record of Your Medicines