

## **What questions should I ask my doctor when I get a new prescription?**

For prescription drugs, your first step to safe and effective treatment is to ask the doctor questions with each new prescription. For example:

- What are the medicine's brand and generic names, and what is the drug supposed to do?
- How and when do I take it, and for how long?
- While taking this medicine, should I avoid:
  - Certain foods, caffeine, alcohol, or other beverages?
  - Other medicines (prescription or over-the-counter)?
  - Dietary supplements or vitamins?
- Will this new medicine work with the medicines I'm already taking?
- What are the possible side effects and what should I do if I experience them?
- What should I do if I miss a dose?

## **What should I be sure to tell my doctor before starting a new medication?**

You should tell your doctor about any other medications you are taking, including over-the-counter medicine and alternative medicines or dietary supplements.

Also be sure to tell your doctor if you:

- Are breastfeeding, pregnant, or may become pregnant
- Are allergic to any foods or drugs
- Have diabetes, kidney disease, or liver disease
- Follow a special diet
- Use tobacco

If you can't ask these questions comfortably, bring a friend to do it for you. Write down the

answers to these questions to make sure you'll remember the details, and have your doctor give you a written copy of complicated directions and medicine names.

### How can I remember to take my medicine?

- Get a weekly pillbox for your medications and fill it at the beginning of each week
- Try taking your medication at the same time every day so it becomes routine, or linking it with a specific activity such as brushing your teeth. If your doctor told you to take your pills with food, try taking them at the same time as you have your meal every day
- Set your watch or cell phone alarm to go off when it's time to take your medicine
- Place a reminder card in a visible place, or have a family member or friend remind you
- Keep a daily written record of when you take your medication, and bring it with you to doctors' appointments
- If your medication routine is too complicated, ask your doctor if there is any way to simplify the process
- Don't wait until you run out of medicine to refill your prescription. Each time you pick up a refill, make a note on your calendar to order and pick up the next refill 1 week before the medicine is due to run out

### General Tips

- Before undergoing any tests or having any surgery with a general anesthetic, including dental surgery, make sure your doctor or dentist knows what medications you are taking
- If your medication is causing unpleasant side effects, don't stop taking it; suddenly stopping some heart medications can increase your risk of dying or having a heart attack. Talk to your doctor to see how you might minimize the side effects – often the dosage can be adjusted, you can take the medicine at a different time, or you can be switched to a different drug
- Keep a list of all the medications you are taking with you at all times
- Read labels carefully before taking a dose – you may want to color-code your different medicine bottles or the medicine of different members of your household so they don't get mixed up
- Ask the doctor's or pharmacist's advice before crushing or splitting tablets – some should only be swallowed whole
- Don't store medicine in the bathroom. Unless instructed otherwise, keep it away from light, heat, and moisture
- Discard outdated medicine
- Keep medicine out of the reach of children. Since children imitate adults, you shouldn't take your medicine in front of them

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