



SIX STEPS TO MEDICATION SAFETY

Get the Facts

Taking medicines involves many decisions. Follow the easy steps below to help prevent problems and increase your safety.

Step 1: Know Your Medicines

- Over-the-counter drugs, herbals, vitamins and supplements are medicines.
- Follow instructions and any warnings on containers about how and when to take your medicine.
- Learn how your medicine might work with other medicines or foods.
- It is important to know why you are taking a new medicine and the reason for stopping a medicine.
- If you are discharged from the hospital with different medicines than your usual at home, be sure you know why they were changed.

Step 2: Use Medicines Correctly and Ask Questions

- When you start a new medicine, be sure to get answers to these questions: Why am I taking this medicine? How long should I take it? When should I take it? If I forget to take it, what should I do? Should I take it with food? Can I drink alcohol (beer, wine or mixed drinks) with it?
- Call your doctor if you have any problems from the medicine that bother you.
- Check the expiration date on the package to know when to throw unused medicine away.
- Do not take someone else's prescription medicines.

Step 3: Organize your Medicines

- Store medicines in their original containers.
- Keep your medicines in the same place, where it's easy to remember to take them on time.
- Using a chart or pill organizer can help. Pill organizers are available at pharmacies and

grocery stores. Choose a style that works for you and use it according to the directions.

- Keep all medicines away from children.

Step 4: Keep a Health Record

- Keep a list of all your medicines, allergies, and vaccinations – include the name of the medicines, how much you take, when and why you take it, and any special directions.
- Write down the names of your doctors and your pharmacy. It is also a good idea to keep a list of all your health problems, and the dates of surgeries, major tests, or procedures.
- Ask us for a copy of a Medication Record. Fill it out and bring a current copy to all your appointments (or bring all your medicines in a bag). Keep a copy handy for emergencies.

Step 5: Work with Your Health Care Providers

- Tell all your health care providers about all your medicines.
- If you are in the hospital, ask the nurse about each medicine you are given and why you are taking it.
- Ask if any lab tests are needed to check how your medicines are working.
- Use only one pharmacy as much as possible. The pharmacist can check for any possible problems.

Step 6: When you Refill Your Prescriptions

- Check labels to see when your prescriptions need to be renewed.
- Ask for written prescriptions at an office or clinic visit, before your current prescription runs out. Asking the office to call in a prescription to the pharmacy can lead to confusion and delays.
- Check your medicine refill and tell the pharmacist if it looks different.

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