

Taking Care When Taking Medications

The more your healthcare team knows about you, the better the care they can provide. To reduce the risks related to using medicines and get the maximum benefit, you need to play an active role on the team. Your physicians, physician assistants, nurses and pharmacist need to know the following:

- your complete medical history
- any allergies and sensitivities you have
- all medications you take routinely and occasionally, both prescription and over-the-counter
- any dietary supplements you take, including vitamins and herbal preparations
- other therapies you use
- anything that may affect your ability to use a medication

Your healthcare team helps you make the best-informed choices, but **you must ask the right questions.** Write down your questions and take notes before you meet with a team member. You may also want to bring a friend or relative to the appointment to help you understand and remember what you learn.

Before you buy a prescription or over-the-counter medicine, learn and understand as much about it as you can, including the generic and brand names, active ingredients, proper uses (indications/

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contraindications), instructions, warnings and precautions, interactions—with food, dietary supplements, other medicines, side effects/adverse reactions, and expiration dates. Drug information for consumers is available from a variety of sources: your pharmacy, the manufacturer, library, bookstore and internet. Ask your healthcare team about anything you don't understand.

When you're ready to use the medicine, always follow the instructions printed on the label. Read the label every time you fill your prescription—before you leave the pharmacy. Be sure you have the right medicine and understand how to use it. Check the label every time you are about to use the medicine, to be sure it's the right medicine, for the right patient, in the right amount, in the right way, at the right time.

Take the recommended dose exactly as prescribed—no matter how tempted you are to use more to feel better faster. Finish all the medicine as directed, even if you start to feel better before all your medicine is completed. Note how you feel and let your healthcare team know of any problems.

If you have any doubts that a medicine is working effectively, do not stop taking it without checking with the healthcare team. Some medications take longer to show a benefit, and some need to be withdrawn gradually to decrease undesirable effects. If you experience a side effect, tell your healthcare team about it immediately. You may need an adjustment in your dosage or a change in medication.

Visit the Federal Drug Administration's website at <http://www.fda.gov/cder> or call 1 (888) INFO-FDA for more tips on being an active member of your healthcare team and to get additional drug information.