

Managing Your Medicines

Toolkit No. 24

When you're taking several medicines, it can be hard to keep track of them. But you'll feel better if you take steps to manage your medicines. These tips can help you stay healthy:

- Know the basics about your medicines, such as what they're for and when to take them.
- Take your medicines as recommended.
- Tell your health care providers which medicines (prescription and nonprescription) and dietary supplements (such as vitamins) you use.

Knowing the basics

Ask your health care provider or your pharmacist these questions about your medicines. Write the information on the “My Medicines” chart.

- What are the names of my medicines (brand and generic names)?
- What's the strength? (for example, the number of milligrams, abbreviated as mg)
- What's this medicine for?
- How long will it take this medicine to work?
- How much should I take for one dose?
- When should I take it? How many times a day? At what times?
- Should I take it on an empty stomach?
- Should I avoid any foods or medicines when I take it?
- Should I avoid alcoholic beverages when I'm taking this medicine?
- How does this medicine affect my blood glucose (sugar) level?
- Do I need to avoid driving when I take this medicine?
- What side effects might happen with this medicine?
- What should I do if I experience side effects?
- What should I do if I miss a dose?
- How should this medicine be stored?
- How long will this supply last? What about refills?

Taking your medicines as recommended

When you don't take a medicine as prescribed, the effect on your health can be unpredictable—or even dangerous. If you're not taking your medicine, think about the reasons. Are there unpleasant side effects? Is the medicine too expensive? Is it hard to remember to take it? Tell your health care providers. They may be able to help.

Tips to help you remember to take your medicines

- Try using a pill organizer with a compartment for each day of the week.
- Link your pill-taking to something in your daily routine. For example, take your morning medicine right after you brush your teeth.
- Use a chart to check off when you've taken your medicines.

Telling your health care providers about your medicines

Some combinations of prescription medicines, nonprescription medicines, and dietary supplements can be harmful. Each of your health care providers should be aware of all of the medicines you take, including nonprescription medicines (such as aspirin and laxatives) and dietary supplements (vitamins, minerals, herbs, and other substances). Use the “My Medicines” chart to list all of your medicines. Take a copy with you when you see each of your health care providers. You can also give a copy to a friend or a family member.

Real-Life Stories from People with Diabetes

The herbal supplement from the health food store was all natural so I didn't think it could do any harm. I told my doctor about it and then I learned that it could keep my blood pressure medicine from working.

Bernice L., age 75 • type 2 diabetes

