

Medication Management

For many patients and caregivers, the ability to remain independent in one's home depends on the ability to manage a complicated medication regimen. Not maintaining a medication regimen is a major cause of re-hospitalizations and emergency room visits. Patients discharged from the hospital on multiple medications are more likely to visit the emergency department and be re-hospitalized during the first six months after discharge. This chapter will give you tools to help manage your or your loved one's medications and help prevent unnecessary, costly hospitalizations and emergency department visits, as well as improve your quality of life.

Questions for Your Physician

1. What is the name of my medication and why am I taking it?
2. What medical condition does this medication treat?
3. How many times a day should I take this medication?
4. What foods, drinks or activities should I avoid while taking this medication?
5. How much medication should I take at one time?
6. How long will it take this medication to work?
7. Will any tests be necessary while I am on this medication?
8. When should I stop taking this medication?
9. What should I do if I miss a dose of medication?
10. Are there any side effects I should know about this medication?
11. When should I call you if I am having side effects?
12. Can I safely mix this medication with vitamins and/or over-the-counter medications?
13. Is there a generic version of my medication?
14. (For people on multiple medications) Are there any combination medications available that may reduce the total number of medications I must take?

Organizing Your Medications

- **Maintain an accurate medication and medical history.**
 - Identify all your medications, including any over-the-counter therapies.
 - Maintaining a complete list of medications may prevent your doctor from adding additional medications.
- **Match each medication to a disease state.**
 - Each medication should match a diagnosis.
- **Identify medications that are for the treatment of side effects.**
 - The use of multiple medications leads to a higher risk of side effects. When side effects occur, additional medications can be used to treat them.
- **Start interventions to ensure you stay on track.**
 - Consider the use of generic options to reduce cost.
 - Make use of aids such as pillboxes and charts.

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- **Review medications upon discharge from hospital.**
 - Evaluating your medication list and educating yourself upon discharge from a facility can reduce duplicate therapies, inappropriate prescribing and unnecessary medications.
- **Evaluate the need for medications.**
 - The appropriateness of the medication for your illness and the potential for side effects must be considered.

Pill Box Use

- Pill boxes are easy to obtain at your local drug store or on the Internet. They are inexpensive and can be customized easily with a marker. Make sure you get a pill box that matches your needs. Speak to your doctor or pharmacist if you have questions.
- Fill your pill box one day before empty or always fill your pill box on the same day each week.
- Gather all the medications you take and write a list of your medication schedule:

Morning	Metformin 500 mg	1 Tablet
	Metoprolol 25 mg	1 Tablet
Evening	Simvastatin 40 mg	2 Tablets
Bedtime	Seroquel 100 mg	1 Tablet

Speak with your doctor or pharmacist to ensure you have your list correctly written from the directions on the medication bottle.

- Fill the pill box according to the list you wrote
- Double check to ensure you have the same pills for each day.
- Check to see if you are going to run out of any medications the next time you refill the pill box.
- If you have problems with your eyesight or finger dexterity, ask a family member or friend to help you fill your pill box.

Pill Chart/Card

- Pill charts can be simple and easy to read, breaking down medication information into what you need to know.
- If you are taking a medication more than 4 times a day, ask your physician if the dosage can be adjusted so that you can take it less frequently.

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Name	Used For	Instructions	Morning	Afternoon	Evening	Night
Simvastatin 20mg	Cholesterol	Take 1 pill at night				
Furosemide 20mg	Fluid	Take 2 pills in the morning and 2 pills in the evening				

- Know when to take your medications. Ask your doctor or pharmacist to recommend the best schedule for you and the medication you are taking.
 - Daily-One time a day either in the morning or at bedtime
 - Twice a day-Usually taken at breakfast and dinner
 - Three times a day-Usually taken with all meals
 - Four times a day- Usually taken with all meals and at bedtime

Before You Leave the Pharmacy

1. Check the label on your medication.
2. Make sure the bottle has your name on it.
3. Make sure the directions are consistent with what your doctor said. If not, tell the pharmacist.
4. Ask for an easy-open cap if you have trouble opening the bottle.
5. Make sure you can read and understand the directions on the container.
6. Know if you are taking a generic or brand name medication. Generic medications may be less expensive than brand name.
 - a. Brand name – a medication sold by a pharmacy company under a protected name (for example, Tylenol)
 - b. Generic – a medication that has the same active ingredients as brand name medication (for example, acetaminophen)

Your Role and Tips To Stay On Track

1. The **most important** thing you can do is **get involved** in your healthcare. Don't be afraid to ask questions.
2. Know the name and strength of the medications you take, their indications, side effects and drug interactions.
3. Buy generics whenever possible.

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4. When you start on a new medication, ask for samples. This way, if you cannot tolerate it, you can change meds before you get a prescription filled.
5. Brown bag it: take all your meds, including prescriptions, over-the-counter (OTC) meds, and dietary/herbal supplements with you when you go to the doctor's office or hospital.
6. If you keep a list, be sure to keep it up to date.
7. Have someone (e.g., spouse or friend) go with you to the doctor. Two sets of ears are always better than one!
8. Ensure dietary/herbal supplements are safe before taking.
9. Store meds in a cool, dry place, preferably someplace where you will remember to take them (on the kitchen table if you take meds with meals or at the bedside if you take at bedtime). **Be sure to keep out of reach of small children.**
10. Ask your pharmacy for flip-top lids if you have a hard time opening the child-resistant lids
11. If you can't remember if you've taken your meds, try a med dispenser. You can fill it up weekly, and you will know at the end of each day if you have taken them or not.
12. Expiration date: The date upon which the manufacturer can no longer guarantee the full effect of the medication.
13. Consider the environment when you dispose of your medications. Instead of flushing them down the toilet or pouring them down the sink, mix meds in cat litter or coffee grounds and place them in the trash.