What Are Medicines? What Are Drugs?

Some people refer to the pills, liquids, creams, or sprays they take as "medicines," and other people call them "drugs." Both words can mean:

- Medicines you get from a pharmacy with a doctor’s prescription
- Pills, liquids, or creams you buy without a prescription to use now and then, for example, for aches and pains, colds, or heartburn
- Vitamins or dietary supplements you take regularly

Drugs you get without a doctor’s prescription are called over-the-counter medicines. Because mixing certain medicines can cause problems, be sure to let your doctor know about all the prescription and over-the-counter drugs you are taking.

At Your Doctor’s Office

If you’ve gone to your doctor because you don’t feel well, the doctor might give you a medicine that will help and will write a prescription. Be sure you:

- Tell your doctor or nurse about all the medicines you take whenever a new drug is prescribed.
- Remind your doctor or nurse about your allergies and any problems you have had with medicines, such as rashes, indigestion, dizziness, or mood changes.
- Understand how to take the medicine before you start using it. Ask questions. It might help to write down the answers.

Questions To Ask Your Doctor About a New Medicine

- What is the name of the medicine, and why am I taking it?
- How many times a day should I take it? At what times?
- Should I take the medicine with food or without? Is there anything I should not eat or drink when taking this medicine?
- What does “as needed” mean?
- When should I stop taking the medicine?
- If I forget to take my medicine, what should I do?
- What side effects can I expect?
- What should I do if I have a problem?

Ask Your Pharmacist

Your pharmacist is an important part of your healthcare team. If you have questions about your medicine after you leave the doctor’s office, then the pharmacist can answer many of them. For example, a pharmacist can tell you how and when to take your medicine, whether a drug may change how another medicine you are taking works, and any side effects you might have. Also, the pharmacist can answer questions about over-the-counter medications.

Try to have all your prescriptions filled at the same pharmacy so your records are in one place. The pharmacist will keep track of all your medications and will be able to tell you if a new drug might cause problems. If you’re not able to use just one pharmacy, show the new pharmacist your list of medicines and over-the-counter drugs when you drop off your prescription.

When you have a prescription filled:

- Tell the pharmacist if you have trouble swallowing pills. There may be liquid medicine available. Do not chew, break, or crush tablets without first finding out if the drug will still work.
- Make sure you can read and understand the name of the medicine and the directions on the container and on the colored warning stickers on the bottle. If the label is hard to read, ask your pharmacist to use larger type.
- Check that you can open the container. If not, ask the pharmacist to put your medicines in bottles that are easier to open.
- Ask about special instructions on where to store a medicine. For example, should it be kept in the refrigerator or in a dry place?
- Check the label on your medicine before leaving the pharmacy. It should have your name on it and the directions given by your doctor. If it doesn’t, don’t take it, and talk with the pharmacist.

Generic or Brand Name?

When getting a prescription filled, sometimes you can choose between either a generic or brand-name drug. Generic and brand-name medicines are alike because they act the same way in the body. They contain the same active ingredients—the part of the medicine that makes it work. A generic drug is the same as a brand-name drug in dosage, safety, strength, quality, the way it works, the way it is taken, and the way it should be used. Generic drugs usually cost less.

If you want a generic drug, ask your healthcare provider if that’s a choice. Not all drugs are available in the generic form, and there might be medical reasons your doctor prefers the brand-name medicine.
Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them.

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them.

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them."

Modern medicine has made our lives better in many ways. It has helped us live longer, healthier lives. But people should take them."

We need to know what medicines we have, what they’re for, and when we should take them.
What Are Medicines? What Are Drugs?

Some people refer to the pills, liquids, creams, or sprays they take as "medicines," and other people call them "drugs." Both words can mean:

- Medicines you get from a pharmacy with a doctor’s prescription
- Pills, liquids, or creams you buy without a prescription to use now and then, for example, for headaches and pains, colds, or heartburn
- Vitamins or dietary supplements you take regularly
- Drugs you get without a doctor’s prescription are called over-the-counter medicines. Because mixing certain medicines can cause problems, be sure to let your doctor know about all the prescription and over-the-counter drugs you are taking.

Questions To Ask Your Doctor About a New Medicine

- What is the name of the medicine, and why am I taking it?
- How many times a day should I take it? At what times? If the bottle says take "4 times a day," does that mean 4 times in 24 hours or 4 times during the daytime?
- Should I take the medicine with food or without? Is there anything I should not eat or drink when taking this medicine?
- What does "as needed" mean?
- When should I stop taking the medicine?
- If I forget to take my medicine, what should I do?
- What side effects can I expect? What should I do if I have a problem?

Ask Your Pharmacist

- Your pharmacist is an important part of your healthcare team. If you have questions about your medicine after you leave the doctor’s office, your pharmacist can answer many of them.
- For example, a pharmacist can tell you how and when to take your medicine, whether a drug might change how another medicine you are taking works, and any side effects you might have. Also, the pharmacist can answer questions about over-the-counter medications.
- Try to have all your prescriptions filled at the same pharmacy so your records are in one place. The pharmacist will keep track of all your medications and will be able to tell you if a new drug might cause problems. If you’re not able to use just one pharmacy, show the new pharmacist your list of medicines and over-the-counter drugs when you drop off your prescription.

- When you have a prescription filled:
  - Tell the pharmacist if you have trouble swallowing pills. There may be liquid medicine available. Do not chew, break, or crush tablets without first finding out if the drug will still work.
  - Make sure you can read and understand the name of the medicine and the directions on the container and on the colored warning stickers on the bottle. If the label is hard to read, ask your pharmacist to use larger type.
  - Check that you can open the container. If not, ask the pharmacist to put your medicines in bottles that are easier to open.
  - Ask about special instructions on where to store a medicine. For example, should it be kept in the refrigerator or in a dry place?
  - Check the label on your medicine before leaving the pharmacy. It should have your name on it and the directions given by your doctor. If it doesn’t, don’t take it, and talk with the pharmacist.

- When getting a prescription filled, sometimes you can choose between either a generic or brand-name drug. Generic and brand-name medicines are alike because they act the same way in the body. They contain the same active ingredients—the part of the medicine that makes it work. A generic drug is the same as a brand-name drug in dosage, safety, strength, quality, the way it works, the way it is taken, and the way it should be used. Generic drugs usually cost less.

- If you want a generic drug, ask your healthcare provider if that’s a choice. Not all drugs are available in the generic form, and there might be medical reasons your doctor prefers the brand-name medicine.
Read and save in one place all written information that comes with the medicine.

Take your medicine in the exact amount and at the time your doctor prescribes.

Call your doctor right away if you have any problems with your medicine or if you are worried that it might be doing more harm than good. Your doctor may be able to change your prescription to a different one that will work better for you.

Use memory aids to take your medicines on time. Some people use calendars, and weekly pill boxes. Find a system that works for you.

Do not skip doses of medication or take half doses to save money. Talk with your doctor or pharmacist if you can’t afford the prescribed medicine. There may be less costly choices or special programs to help with the cost of certain drugs.

Avoid mixing alcohol and medicine. Some medicines may not work correctly if you are drinking. Never exceed the recommended dosage.

Take your medicine until it’s finished or until your doctor says it’s okay to stop.

Don’t take medicines prescribed for another person or give yours to someone else.

Don’t take medicine in the dark. To avoid making a mistake, turn your light on before reaching for your pills.

Check the expiration dates on your medicine bottles. Your pharmacist can probably tell you how to safely get rid of medicine you no longer need or that is out of date. The pharmacist might be able to dispose of it for you.

Make sure you store all medicines and supplements out of sight and out of reach of children. And don’t take your medicines in front of young children. They might try to copy you.

Shopping for Medicines Online

Medicines can cost a lot. If you have a drug plan through your insurance, you can probably save money by order prescription or over-the-counter—that are strong enough to hurt you if you aren’t used the right way. Learn to be a smart consumer of medicine.

Medicare Prescription Drug Plans

Medicare has prescription drug plans for people with Medicare to help save money on medicines. For information please call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227) or visit the Medicare website www.medicare.gov.

What About Over-the-Counter Medicines?

Many of the ideas in this AgePage are also true for over-the-counter (OTC) drugs, like medicines to relieve coughs, colds, allergies, pain, and heartburn. Be careful when taking an OTC. For example, don’t take a cough and cold product if you only have a runny nose and no cough. And, check with your doctor before taking aspirin if you are on a blood-thinning medicine, because aspirin also slows blood clotting.

Other things to remember:

Measure the dose of a liquid OTC medicine as carefully as you would a prescription drug. Use a measuring spoon, since spoons you eat with vary in size.

Be careful—over-the-counter medicines can have side effects.

Take the amount suggested on the label. If you don’t get better, see your doctor.

Read the label—even if you have used the OTC product in the past. Important information can change.

Remember, medicines—whether prescription or over-the-counter—that are strong enough to hurt you can also be strong enough to hurt you if they aren’t used the right way. Learn to be a smart consumer of medicine.

For More Information

Here are some helpful resources:

Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality
540 Gaither Road, Suite 2000
Rockville, MD 20850
1-301-427-1361
www.ahrq.gov

Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services
7000 Security Boulevard
Baltimore, MD 21244-1850
1-800-633-4227 (toll-free) www.medicare.gov

Food and Drug Administration
10903 New Hampshire Avenue Silver Spring, MD 20962
1-888-463-6322 (toll-free) www.fda.gov

Partnership for Prescription Assistance
1-888-477-2200 (toll-free) www.pparx.org

For more information on health and aging, contact:

National Institute on Aging Information Center
P.O. Box 8017
Gaithersburg, MD 20888-8017
1-800-222-2225 (toll-free)
1-800-222-4225 (TDD/toll-free) www.nia.nih.gov

To sign up for regular email alerts about new publications and other information from the NIA, go to www.nia.nih.gov/HealthInformation.

Visit NHISeniorHealth (www.nhiahseniorhealth.gov), a senior-friendly website from the National Institute on Aging and the National Library of Medicine. This website has health information for older adults. Special features make it simple to use. For example, you can click on a button to have the text read out loud or to make the type larger.

www.medicare.gov

www.fda.gov

www.nia.nih.gov

www.ahrq.gov

www.nia.nih.gov/Espanol

www.nia.nih.gov

www.pparx.org

www.fda.gov

www.medicare.gov
Read and save in one place all written information that comes with the medicine.

Take your medicine in the exact amount and at the time your doctor prescribes.

Call your doctor right away if you have any problems with your medicine or if you are worried that it might be doing more harm than good. Your doctor may be able to change your prescription to a different one that will work better for you.

Use a memory aid to take your medicines on time. Some people use meals or bedtime as reminders to take their medicine. Other people use charts, calendars, and weekly pill boxes. Find a system that works for you.

Do not skip doses of medication or take half doses to save money. Talk with your doctor or pharmacist if you can’t afford the prescribed medicine. There may be less costly choices or special programs to help save money on medicines. For information please call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227) or visit the Medicare website, www.medicare.gov.

Take your medicine until it’s finished or until your doctor says it’s okay to stop.

Don’t take medicines prescribed for another person or give yours to someone else.

Don’t take medicine in the dark. To avoid making a mistake, turn your light on before reaching for your pills.

Check the expiration dates on your medicine bottles. Your pharmacist can probably tell you how safely get rid of medicine you no longer need or that is out of date. The pharmacist might be able to dispose of it for you.

Make sure you store all medicines and supplements out of sight and out of reach of children. And don’t take your medicines in front of young children. They might try to copy you.

Avoid mixing alcohol and medicine. Some medicines may not work correctly with your medicine. Other things to remember:

- Measure the dose of a liquid OTC medicine carefully as you would a prescription drug. Use a measuring spoon, since spoons you eat with vary in size.
- Be careful—over-the-counter medicines can have side effects.
- Take the amount suggested on the label. If you don’t get better, see your doctor.
- Read the label—even if you have used the OTC product in the past. Important information can change.
- Remember, medicines—whether prescription or over-the-counter—that are strong enough to cure you can also be strong enough to hurt you if you aren’t used the right way. Learn to be a smart consumer of medicine.

For More Information
Here are some helpful resources:

Medicaid Prescription Drug Plans have programs to help with the cost of medicines. For information please call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227) or visit the Medicare website, www.medicare.gov.

What About Over-the-Counter Medicines?
Many of the ideas in this AgePage are also true for over-the-counter (OTC) drugs, like medicines to relieve coughs, cold, allergies, pain, and heartburn. Be careful when taking an OTC. For example, don’t take a cough and cold product if you only have a runny nose and no cough. And, check with your doctor before taking aspirin if you are on a blood-thinning medicine, because aspirin also slows blood clotting.

For More Information
Here are some helpful resources:
Food and Drug Administration 10905 New Hampshire Avenue Silver Spring, MD 20993-0892 1-888-463-6332 (toll-free) www.fda.gov
Partnership for Prescription Assistance 1-888-477-2000 (toll-free) www.ppa.org

For more information on health and aging, contact:
National Institute on Aging Information Center P.O. Box 8017 Gaithersburg, MD 20898-8017 1-800-222-2225 (toll-free) 1-800-222-4225 (TDD/toll-free) www.nia.nih.gov

To sign up for regular email alerts about new publications and other information from the NIA, go to www.nia.nih.gov/HealthInformation.

Visit NIHSeniorHealth (www.nihseniorhealth.gov), a senior-friendly website from the National Institute on Aging and the National Library of Medicine. This website has health information for older adults. Special features make it simple to use. For example, you can click on a button to have the text read out loud or to make the type larger.
Medicare Prescription Drug Plans

Medicare has prescription drug plans for people with Medicare to help save money on medicines. For information please call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227) or visit the Medicare website www.medicare.gov.

What About Over-the-Counter Medicines?

Many of the ideas in this AgePage are also true for over-the-counter (OTC) drugs, like medicines to relieve coughs, colds, allergies, pain, and heartburn. Be careful when taking an OTC. For example, don’t take a cough and cold product if you only have a runny nose and no cough. And, check with your doctor before taking aspirin if you are on a blood-thinning medicine, because aspirin also slows blood clotting.

Other things to remember:

- Measure the dose of a liquid OTC medicine as carefully as you would a prescription drug. Use a measuring spoon, since spoons you eat with vary in size.
- Be careful—over-the-counter medicines can have side effects.
- Take the amount suggested on the label. If you don’t get better, see your doctor.
- Read the label—even if you have used the OTC product in the past. Important information can change.
- Remember, medicines—whether prescription or over-the-counter—that are strong enough to cure you can also be strong enough to hurt you if you aren’t used the right way. Learn to be a smart consumer of medicine.

For More Information

Here are some helpful resources:
Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality
540 Gauther Road, Suite 2000
Rockville, MD 20850
1-301-427-1361
www.ahrq.gov

Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services
7500 Security Boulevard
Baltimore, MD 21244-1850
1-800-633-4227 (toll-free)
www.medicare.gov

Food and Drug Administration
10905 New Hampshire Avenue
Silver Spring, MD 20903-0892
1-888-463-6532 (toll-free)
www.fda.gov

Partnership for Prescription Assistance
1-888-477-2009 (toll-free)
www.pparx.org

For more information on health and aging, contact
National Institute on Aging Information Center
P.O. Box 8017
Gaithersburg, MD 20888-0817
1-800-222-2225 (toll-free)
1-800-222-4225 (TDD/toll-free)
www.nia.nih.gov
www.nia.nih.gov/Español

To sign up for regular email alerts about new publications and other information from the NIA, go to www.nia.nih.gov/HealthInformation.

Visit NIHSeniorHealth (www.nihseniorhealth.gov), a senior-friendly website from the National Institute on Aging and the National Library of Medicine: This website has health information for older adults. Special features make it simple to use. For example, you can click on a button to have the text read out loud or to make the type larger.

- Read and save in one place all written information that comes with the medicine.
- Take your medicine in the exact amount and at the time your doctor prescribes.
- Call your doctor right away if you have any problems with your medicine or if you are worried that it might be doing more harm than good. Your doctor may be able to change your prescription to a different one that will work better for you.
- Use a memory aid to take your medicines on time. Some people use meals or bedtime as reminders to take their medicine. Other people use charts, calendars, and weekly pill boxes. Find a system that works for you.
- Do not skip doses of medication or take half doses to save money. Talk with your doctor or pharmacist if you can’t afford the prescribed medicine. There may be less costly choices or special programs to help with the cost of certain drugs.
- Avoid mixing alcohol and medicine. Some medicines may not work correctly if they aren’t used the right way. Learn to be a smart consumer of medicine.
- Take your medicine until it’s finished or until your doctor says it’s okay to stop.
- Don’t take medicines prescribed for another person or give yours to someone else.
- Don’t take medicine in the dark. To avoid making a mistake, turn your light on before reaching for your pills.
- Check the expiration dates on your medicine bottles. Your pharmacist can probably tell you how to safely get rid of medicine you no longer need or that is out of date. The pharmacist might be able to dispose of it for you.
- Make sure you store all medicines and supplements out of sight and out of reach of children. And don’t take your medicines in front of young children. They might try to copy you.

Medicines can cost a lot. If you have a drug plan through your insurance, you can probably save money by order certain drugs from yours from them rather than at your neighborhood pharmacy. Or, you might be thinking about buying yours on the Internet. But how can you tell which websites are safe and reliable? The Food and Drug Administration (see For More Information) has more information on buying medicines and medical products online.

Shopping for Medicines Online

Remember, medicines—whether prescription or over-the-counter—that are strong enough to cure you can also be strong enough to hurt you if they aren’t used the right way. Learn to be a smart consumer of medicine.

For More Information

Here are some helpful resources:
Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality
540 Gauther Road, Suite 2000
Rockville, MD 20850
1-301-427-1361
www.ahrq.gov

Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services
7500 Security Boulevard
Baltimore, MD 21244-1850
1-800-633-4227 (toll-free)
www.medicare.gov

Food and Drug Administration
10905 New Hampshire Avenue
Silver Spring, MD 20903-0892
1-888-463-6532 (toll-free)
www.fda.gov

Partnership for Prescription Assistance
1-888-477-2009 (toll-free)
www.pparx.org

For more information on health and aging, contact
National Institute on Aging Information Center
P.O. Box 8017
Gaithersburg, MD 20888-0817
1-800-222-2225 (toll-free)
1-800-222-4225 (TDD/toll-free)
www.nia.nih.gov
www.nia.nih.gov/Español

To sign up for regular email alerts about new publications and other information from the NIA, go to www.nia.nih.gov/HealthInformation.

Visit NIHSeniorHealth (www.nihseniorhealth.gov), a senior-friendly website from the National Institute on Aging and the National Library of Medicine: This website has health information for older adults. Special features make it simple to use. For example, you can click on a button to have the text read out loud or to make the type larger.

- Read and save in one place all written information that comes with the medicine.
- Take your medicine in the exact amount and at the time your doctor prescribes.
- Call your doctor right away if you have any problems with your medicine or if you are worried that it might be doing more harm than good. Your doctor may be able to change your prescription to a different one that will work better for you.
- Use a memory aid to take your medicines on time. Some people use meals or bedtime as reminders to take their medicine. Other people use charts, calendars, and weekly pill boxes. Find a system that works for you.
- Do not skip doses of medication or take half doses to save money. Talk with your doctor or pharmacist if you can’t afford the prescribed medicine. There may be less costly choices or special programs to help with the cost of certain drugs.
- Avoid mixing alcohol and medicine. Some medicines may not work correctly if they aren’t used the right way. Learn to be a smart consumer of medicine.
- Take your medicine until it’s finished or until your doctor says it’s okay to stop.
- Don’t take medicines prescribed for another person or give yours to someone else.
- Don’t take medicine in the dark. To avoid making a mistake, turn your light on before reaching for your pills.
- Check the expiration dates on your medicine bottles. Your pharmacist can probably tell you how to safely get rid of medicine you no longer need or that is out of date. The pharmacist might be able to dispose of it for you.
- Make sure you store all medicines and supplements out of sight and out of reach of children. And don’t take your medicines in front of young children. They might try to copy you.

Medicines can cost a lot. If you have a drug plan through your insurance, you can probably save money by order certain drugs from yours from them rather than at your neighborhood pharmacy. Or, you might be thinking about buying yours on the Internet. But how can you tell which websites are safe and reliable? The Food and Drug Administration (see For More Information) has more information on buying medicines and medical products online.

Shopping for Medicines Online

Medicines can cost a lot. If you have a drug plan through your insurance, you can probably save money by order certain drugs from yours from them rather than at your neighborhood pharmacy. Or, you might be thinking about buying yours on the Internet. But how can you tell which websites are safe and reliable? The Food and Drug Administration (see For More Information) has more information on buying medicines and medical products online.

What About Over-the-Counter Medicines?

Many of the ideas in this AgePage are also true for over-the-counter (OTC) drugs, like medicines to relieve coughs, colds, allergies, pain, and heartburn. Be careful when taking an OTC. For example, don’t take a cough and cold product if you only have a runny nose and no cough. And, check with your doctor before taking aspirin if you are on a blood-thinning medicine, because aspirin also slows blood clotting.

Other things to remember:

- Measure the dose of a liquid OTC medicine as carefully as you would a prescription drug. Use a measuring spoon, since spoons you eat with vary in size.
- Be careful—over-the-counter medicines can have side effects.
- Take the amount suggested on the label. If you don’t get better, see your doctor.
- Read the label—even if you have used the OTC product in the past. Important information can change.
- Remember, medicines—whether prescription or over-the-counter—that are strong enough to cure you can also be strong enough to hurt you if they aren’t used the right way. Learn to be a smart consumer of medicine.

For More Information

Here are some helpful resources:
Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality
540 Gauther Road, Suite 2000
Rockville, MD 20850
1-301-427-1361
www.ahrq.gov

Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services
7500 Security Boulevard
Baltimore, MD 21244-1850
1-800-633-4227 (toll-free)
www.medicare.gov

Food and Drug Administration
10905 New Hampshire Avenue
Silver Spring, MD 20903-0892
1-888-463-6532 (toll-free)
www.fda.gov

Partnership for Prescription Assistance
1-888-477-2009 (toll-free)
www.pparx.org

For more information on health and aging, contact
National Institute on Aging Information Center
P.O. Box 8017
Gaithersburg, MD 20888-0817
1-800-222-2225 (toll-free)
1-800-222-4225 (TDD/toll-free)
www.nia.nih.gov

To sign up for regular email alerts about new publications and other information from the NIA, go to www.nia.nih.gov/HealthInformation.

Visit NIHSeniorHealth (www.nihseniorhealth.gov), a senior-friendly website from the National Institute on Aging and the National Library of Medicine: This website has health information for older adults. Special features make it simple to use. For example, you can click on a button to have the text read out loud or to make the type larger.