



## Full Version 6. Work with Your Pharmacist

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*Pharmacists are trained professionals who have an important role in patient care. They are a key resource if you have concerns or questions while taking medications, and herbal or vitamin products.*

### Tips for your medication safety

- Work with your pharmacist to use your medicines safely.
  - Ask the pharmacist for printed drug information before taking new medicines. If the print is too small, ask the pharmacist for larger print.
  - Read the printed information on your medicines carefully for side effects, precautions or reactions with other medicines, supplements or vitamins.
  - Tell your pharmacist if you have any allergies. Be sure you clearly know:
    - The names of your medicines (generic drug names and brand names)
    - The reasons you take them (diabetes, high blood pressure)
    - How they work (control blood sugar level, lower blood pressure)
    - How much to take (the dose) and how and when to take them
      - Do you swallow a pill? Do you inhale a nasal spray? Do you apply it to your skin?
      - Do you take your medicine with food or on an empty stomach?
      - Do you take your medicine until it is all finished?
      - Do you take medication once a day or twice a day in the morning and evening?
      - Take 2 pills per day. When? At the same time? In the morning? At night? Be sure to ask.
      - Take at bedtime. Does it matter if you go to bed at 7:00 pm or midnight? What if you can't sleep at all? Be sure to ask.
      - Take with water. Does that mean you can take medicine with any liquid like coffee, soda, alcohol, or milk instead?
      - Don't chew, crush or break tablets unless directions say so. Some medicines must be swallowed whole.
    - The possible side effects (drowsiness, nausea)
    - How might the medicine affect your senses (blurred vision, loss of hearing)
    - What to do if side effects occur (headaches, loss of appetite)
    - What to do if you forget to take your medicine - Do **not** take more than prescribed. Call your pharmacist or doctor to find out what to do about a missed dose. Tell your pharmacist if you have trouble remembering to take your medicine.
    - What foods, drinks, activities and other medicines to avoid when taking your medicine - Do **not** use alcohol when taking certain medicine. Do not drive when taking others.
    - How to store your medicine - Keep them in the original bottles. Do not store medicine in the bathroom cabinet. Heat and dampness can cause medicines to break down. Store all medicine in the same place. Keep away from children.

- How to get rid of unused or expired medicine - Do not throw medicine in the garbage. Do not flush down the toilet. Return unused medicine to the pharmacy.
- If you are unsure, always ask questions.
- Ask questions if you do not know what medical terms mean.
- Check to be sure your name, address and medical numbers are correct on medication labels, drug information sheets, and delivery labels.

**Note:** Double check:

- Right patient name
- Right medication name
- Right dose (amount)
- Right time of day to be taken
- Right route (oral, topical, etc.)
- Call your pharmacists as soon as possible if you have concerns about your medicine.
- Ask your pharmacist questions when:
  - A prescription dose is increased or decreased without your knowledge.
  - The color or shape of your pills is changed.
  - A new medicine is added to the list and you did not know about it.
  - You have directions you do not understand.
  - You are worried about running out of medicine.
- Do **not** stop taking or adjust a medicine without **first** checking with the pharmacist.
- Call your doctor or pharmacist, if you feel your medicine is not working.
- Complete and carry a current *It's Safe to Ask Medication Card*. Show the card to healthcare providers. Go to [www.safetoask.ca](http://www.safetoask.ca) for a free copy.
- Be sure your family knows where you store your medicine in case of an emergency.
- Ask your provider about wearing a Medic Alert bracelet if you have a serious medical problem.
- Try to use one pharmacy for all your medication needs.

## Resources

### Canadian Resources

- *Medication Card*. Manitoba Institute for Patient Safety (MIPS). [www.safetoask.ca/?page\\_id=145](http://www.safetoask.ca/?page_id=145)
- *MIPS TIPS Medications Safety*. Manitoba Institute for Patient Safety (MIPS) [https://mips.ca/ms\\_ista\\_med\\_card.html](https://mips.ca/ms_ista_med_card.html)
- *Nothing About Me, Without Me! A Practical Guide for Avoiding Medical Errors*. Melinda Ashton and Linda Richards. Victoria, BC: Trafford Publishing; 2003.

### Websites

- Consumers Advancing Patient Safety (CAPS) (United States). [www.patientsafety.org/](http://www.patientsafety.org/)
- Institute for Safe Medication Practices (ISMP) Canada, [www.ismp-canada.org/index.htm](http://www.ismp-canada.org/index.htm)
- *Medication Reconciliation. Safer Healthcare Now!* <http://www.saferhealthcarenow.ca/EN/Interventions/medrec/Pages/default.aspx>
- [www.SafeMedicationUse.ca](http://www.SafeMedicationUse.ca) The Institute for Safe Medication Practices Canada (ISMP) created this website to expand the role of consumers in the Canadian Medication Incident Reporting and Prevention System (CMIRPS). The site provides consumer-friendly materials to support consumers in medication safety.

### Books

- *100 Questions and Answers about Communicating with your Healthcare Provider*. John A. King and Cynthia R. King. Sudbury, MA: Jones and Bartlett; 2009.
- *You The Smart Patient: An Insider's Handbook for Getting the Best Treatment*. Michael F. Roizen and Mehmet C. Ox. New York, NY: Free Press; 2006.