

Understanding Your Medication

The following information is based on resources from the “*Knowledge is the Best Medicine*” website – an online resource for information to help you keep track of your medication at home. Please visit www.knowledgeisthebestmedicine.org for more information.

Types of Medication:

- **Prescription medicines** – such as antibiotics, blood pressure and other medicines which are obtained with a prescription
- **Over the counter medicines (OTCs)** – such as allergy medicines, cough and cold medicines
- **Vitamins and minerals**
- **Natural health products** – such as herbals, homeopathic medicines
- **Traditional medicines** – which could include medicines specific to certain cultures or countries



Tablets



Capsules



Liquids



Ear / Eye Drops



Inhalers / Puffers



Nasal Sprays



Patches



Injections



Creams / Ointments



Suppositories

Helpful Tips about Your Medication

- It is best to take your medicines according to the directions on the label.
- If directed, take your medicines at the same time each day (e.g., with breakfast, at bedtime, etc.).
- If you forget to take your medicine, do not assume you can double the dose, call your pharmacist for information on the best course of action.
- Take your medicine for the full length of time you were instructed, even if you start to feel better.
- Do not share your prescription medicines with anyone and do not take anyone else's prescription medicines.
- Do not expect a new prescription every time you visit your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.
- Use the same pharmacy for all of your prescriptions.
- Before you use an over-the-counter medicine or natural health product, make sure it is safe to use with your prescription medicines.
- Tell your doctor, pharmacist or nurse if you have any allergies or have had a reaction to medications in the past.

Understanding How and When to Take Your Medication

If you are unable to give yourself a required medication, a nurse may help you. Medications have different ways they need to be taken in order to work properly. Not all of these can be done at home or without special training.

The definitions below will help you understand how to take your medication.

Dose:

How much medication you take. Only the dose stated in the prescription or instructions should be taken.

Route:

The way you take your medication.

- Oral route: swallowed by mouth as a pill, liquid, tablet or lozenge
- Rectal route: inserted into the rectum
- Intravenous route: injected into vein with a syringe or into intravenous (IV) line
- Infusion: injected into a vein with an IV line and slowly dripped in over time
- Intramuscular route: injected into muscle through skin with a syringe
- Topical route: applied to skin
- Enteric: delivered directly into the stomach with a G-tube or J-tube
- Nasal: sprays or pumps that deliver drug into the nose
- Inhaled: inhaled through a tube or mask (e.g. lung medications)
- Otic: drops into the ear
- Ophthalmic: drops, gel or ointment for the eye
- Sublingual: under the tongue
- Buccal: held inside the cheek
- Transdermal: a patch on the skin
- Subcutaneous: injected just under the skin



Frequency:

How often you need to take your medication. Timing of medication is very important. Some medications need to reach a consistent level in your bloodstream in order to be effective. This means that your medications need to be taken at the right times to keep that level of drug in your system so it works the way it is intended.

Hold or d/c:

If a medication is on “hold,” you should not take it again until your doctor or pharmacist tells you. Medications can be put on hold if it could interact with another, new medication you are on, and put you at risk. D/C means the medication has been discontinued, and you should no longer take it.

The Best Ways to Store Your Medication

- Store your medicines in a cool, dry place away from sunlight. Heat and moisture (e.g., storage in the bathroom) can damage certain medicines.
- Keep medicines away from children and pets. Store them in a place where they cannot see or reach them.
- Only store your medicines in the refrigerator if instructed to do so
- Do not use your medicines after the expiry date has passed
- To reduce the risk your medications being stolen (especially narcotics), store them in a safe place
- It is a good idea to clean out your medicine cabinet once a year, and take outdated ones to your pharmacy for disposal.
- Gather any medicines that are expired, are no longer needed, are not in their original container or have labels that are no longer clear, and return them to your pharmacy.

Tips for Taking Your Medication from a Pharmacist



- If you take more than one medicine, use daily or weekly pill containers to help remind you when to take the medicine.
- If you have trouble opening the pill bottles, ask your pharmacy to put your medicine in a bottle with an “easy open” lid.
- If you have trouble reading the prescription label, ask the pharmacist to use large print on the labels.
- If you find it difficult to swallow pills, ask if your medicine comes in a liquid form, or if you are able to chew or crush it.
- Try to use the same pharmacy for all of your medicines so they will have all your records and can check for drug interactions with each prescription.
- When you pick up your prescription refill, check that the medicine looks the same as the last time, if it doesn’t, ask your pharmacist.
- If other people in your family are taking medicines, use a marker to highlight the person’s name on each bottle or store them in different locations.
- Read the patient information sheets you receive when you pick up your prescription from the pharmacy. Ask your pharmacist if you have any questions.

The Information in Your Prescription

It is a good idea to make sure that you can read and understand what is written on your prescription before you leave your doctor's appointment or pharmacy. You should know which medicine you are being prescribed and how you are supposed to take it.

These are some commonly used abbreviations that you may find on a prescription for when to take your medicine.

BID - twice a day	Q12H - every 12 hours	SL - under the tongue
TID - three times a day	QAM - every morning	ung - ointment
QID - four times a day	PO - by mouth	ac - before meals
HS - at bedtime	PRN - as needed	pc - after meals
Q4H - every 4 hours	UD - as directed	STAT - right away

Parts of a Prescription Label

There is important information on a prescription label. Knowing what the information means can help you know which medicine you are taking and how to take it properly.

The look of the label will depend on which pharmacy you use. In general, your label will contain the following information.



A= Pharmacy Name

B= Prescription Number (this refers to your personal prescription)

C= Directions on how to take the medication

D= Generic medication name

E= How much medication is being given to you in total

F= Form of medication given to you

G= Number of refills remaining

H= Name of medication from manufacturer

I= Name of person who prescribed medicine

J= Abbreviation for drug manufacturer name

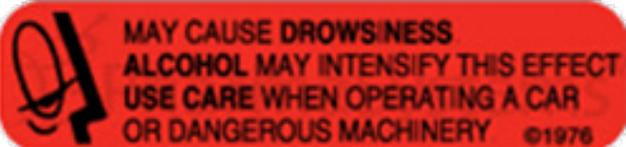
K= Drug Identification Number (DIN)*

* A Drug Identification Number (DIN) is an eight digit number assigned by Health Canada to a drug product prior to being sold in Canada. It uniquely identifies all drug products sold in a dosage form in Canada and is located on the label of prescription and over-the-counter drug products that have been evaluated and authorized for sale in Canada.

Meaning of the Extra Stickers on Your Medication Containers

Here is a list of commonly used auxiliary labels and stickers found on medication, and an explanation of what they mean.

These stickers are used to remind you of important information about your medicines.

	<p>Take with food - Take medication with a meal or a snack. Food can help certain medications be absorbed into the body better or taking medications with food can help prevent side effects like stomach upset and nausea.</p>
	<p>Do not chew or crush. Swallow them whole. Some tablets and capsules have a protective coating that allows the medication to be released slowly. Crushing or chewing the protective coating will destroy it and all of the medication will be released at once, which can be harmful.</p>
	<p>Do not drink milk or eat dairy products. Calcium, antacids and iron can lessen the amount some medications are absorbed into the body. To avoid this, take your medication at least one hour before or after these products. Dairy products and multivitamins contain calcium. Iron supplements, multivitamins and certain foods can contain iron.</p>
	<p>Do not eat grapefruit. Grapefruit and grapefruit juice can interact with certain medications, affecting the level of medication in your body. While you are on these medications, it is best to avoid eating grapefruit or drinking grapefruit juice.</p>
	<p>Finish all this medication. For some medications, it is important to finish the whole prescription, especially for antibiotics.</p>
	<p>May cause drowsiness. Some medications can cause drowsiness and may make driving a car or working with heavy machinery dangerous. Alcohol can make these effects worse.</p>
	<p>Medication should be taken with plenty of water. Drink at least a full glass of water with medication or right after taking it. Water can help the medication be absorbed into the body and can help prevent side effects like irritation to the throat.</p>



**Rinse mouth thoroughly
after each use**

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Rinse mouth thoroughly after each use. When using an inhaler, not all of the medication particles are inhaled directly into the lungs, even if the correct technique for inhaling is used. Some of the medication particles can remain in the mouth and throat. With certain inhalers, this can result in an oral thrush infection. Rinsing your mouth after each use will help to prevent this from happening.



CERTAIN MEDICATIONS
(Antibiotics, Antiinfectives) may
ALTER the EFFECTIVENESS of
BIRTH CONTROL PILLS Ask your
M D or Pharmacist

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Certain medications may alter the effectiveness of birth control pills. Some medications can lessen the effectiveness of your birth control pill. A back up method of birth control should be used. Consult with your pharmacist, physician or nurse for more a more detailed explanation, including how long back up birth control is necessary.



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**TAKE MEDICATION ON AN
EMPTY STOMACH**
1 HOUR BEFORE OR 2 TO 3 HOURS
AFTER A MEAL UNLESS OTHERWISE
DIRECTED BY YOUR DOCTOR

Take medication on an empty stomach. Some medications are better absorbed into the body when taken on an empty stomach. It is recommended to take these medications at least one hour before or two hours after eating.