

TAKE PART IN DECISIONS ABOUT YOUR TREATMENT

Take part in your treatment decisions. Don't be afraid to ask questions and talk about your concerns. You may want to write down questions to ask at your next visit to the doctor. By taking time to ask questions now, you may avoid problems later. Don't be afraid to "bother" your doctor with your concerns and questions. Bring a friend or family member with you when you visit your doctor. Talking over your options with someone you trust can help you make better choices, especially if you are not feeling well. You can also talk to your pharmacist about the medications you are taking.

Here are some points to cover each time a new medication is prescribed.

- **Ask about the risks and benefits of each medicine.**
- **Ask how often you or your doctor will have to check your medicine's effects.** For example, checking your blood pressure if you are taking a medicine to lower it, or having a laboratory test done to make sure the levels of medicine in your blood are not too high or too low.
- **Tell your doctor about all the medicines you are already taking.** This includes prescription medicines and medicines you buy without a prescription, such as aspirin, laxatives, vitamins, and herbal remedies. Then your doctor can avoid giving you a new medicine that may not work well with one you already take. It is helpful and useful to keep a written list of all the medications you are currently taking—prescription and non-prescription—including the dose and instructions for use.
- **Tell your doctor what is important to you about your medicines.** You may want a medicine with fewer side effects, or fewest doses to take each day. If you have trouble swallowing, you may want a liquid form of medicine. To lower cost, there may be a generic drug or another lower-cost medicine you can take.
- **Tell your doctor if you have any allergies to medications or if you have had any troubling side effects from medicines.**
- **Tell your doctor if you have any illnesses or problems for which another doctor or health professional is treating you.**

FOLLOW YOUR TREATMENT PLAN

To follow the treatment plan you and your doctor agree on, ask questions, and tell your doctor your needs and concerns. Here are some points to cover.

- **The name of the medicine and what it is supposed to do.**
- **How and when to take the medicine, how much to take, and for how long.** Ask about any terms or directions you do not understand.
- **What food, drinks, other medicines, or activities you should avoid while taking the medicine.**
- **What side effects the medicine may have, and what to do if they occur.**
- **Whether you can get a refill, and if so, how often.**
- **What to do if you miss a dose.**
- **Ask if there is written information you can take home.** Most pharmacies have information sheets on your prescription medicines.
- **Tell your doctor of any concerns you have about using the medicine.**
- **Tell your doctor if you are not taking your medicine as directed.** For example, some people may stop taking their medicine, take a lower dose, or skip doses if they are having side effects. Your doctor needs to know about any changes in your treatment plan. Do not let guilty feelings or embarrassment keep you from telling your doctor this important information.

Adhering to the medication regimen prescribed by your physician is important for your medications to work properly. Taking your medication in the dose and at the times prescribed can be very important to the action of the medication. If you have any questions or problems with taking the medicine exactly as it was prescribed by your doctor, contact your physician or pharmacist.

WATCH FOR PROBLEMS AND GET HELP SOLVING THEM

Talk to your doctor and pharmacist about problems you may be having with your medicines. Most problems can be avoided or solved if you know what to watch out for and if you talk with your doctor about what is happening.

- **Ask about results of medical tests that show how the medicine is working.**
- **Ask if the medicine is still needed.**
- **Tell about any problems you are having taking your medicine,** including side effects or any new problems that may be related to the medicine. If you experience any effects, such as dizziness, drowsiness, confusion, rashes, or other unexplained symptoms, contact your physician or pharmacist immediately.
- **Tell about any new medicines that another doctor gave you, and any new over-the-counter (non-prescription) medicines that you are taking.**

HOW YOUR PHARMACIST CAN HELP

When you pick up your medicines, always talk to the pharmacist and ask any questions you may have about your medications. Here are some points to cover.

- **The name of the medicine and what it is supposed to do.**
- **How and when to take the medicine, how much to take, and for how long.** Ask about any terms or directions you do not understand.
- **Any special techniques or devices for administering the medication** (e.g., liquids that you need to “shake well” before pouring the dose, or special instructions for the use of inhalers, suppositories, eye drops, or patches).
- **What food, drinks, other medicines, or activities you should avoid while taking the medicine.**
- **What side effects the medicine may cause, and what to do if they occur.**
- **Whether you can get a refill, and if so, how often.**
- **What to do if you miss a dose.**
- **How should the medicine be stored.** Do any of the medicines require refrigeration?
- **Ask if there is written information you can take home.** Most pharmacies have information sheets about your prescription medicines.

Try to use one pharmacy for all your medicine needs. Make sure the pharmacy keeps a complete “profile” of all your medications. Give a complete list of all medications to your pharmacist, including anything that you use that is available without a prescription. Make sure you include things such as vitamin supplements and home remedies, as these may interact with prescriptions you may also be taking. This will help your pharmacist keep track of your medicines, identify any duplicate therapy or potential interactions between the medications you take, and help you solve any problems you may have with your medicines.

