

# NIH Senior Health

Built with You in Mind

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## Taking Medicines

### Managing Your Medicines

#### Take Charge of Your Medicines

Keeping track of your medicines is very important. Making sure that they are stored properly, that they have not expired when you take them, and that prescriptions are refilled requires time and attention.

Also, taking many different medications at the same time is difficult. It can be hard to remember what each drug is for, when you should take it, and how you should take it. This is especially true for people with memory problems. However, there are simple strategies you can use to help you manage your medicines wisely.

#### Simple Strategies

- **Keep a checklist** of all the prescription and over-the-counter medications you take. For each medicine, mark the amount you take, the time of day you take it, and whether it should be taken with food. Store two copies of the list: one on the refrigerator door or where your medications are stored, and one in your wallet or purse. You may wish to [print out the enlarged version](#) of the chart on this page to help you.
- **Review your medicine record** at every visit to the doctor and whenever your doctor prescribes new medicine. Your doctor may have new information about your medicines that might be important to you. Whenever possible, have your health care provider write down advice and instructions for taking each medication. Keep this information handy.
- **Ask your pharmacist to provide your medicine in large, easy-to open containers with large-print labels.** Keep medicines in their original containers, and never put more than one kind of medicine in the same container. Consider using multi-day dispensers that organize your medicines by the day and time that you should take them.
- **To determine how a medication should be stored,** ask your doctor or pharmacist and/or read the label. Some medications must be stored in the refrigerator. Your bathroom medicine cabinet is not a good place to store most medications due to the moist, warm conditions that can cause drugs to break down more quickly.
- **Don't stop taking a prescription drug unless your doctor says it's okay** -- even if you are feeling better.
- **Get prescriptions refilled early enough so you won't run out of medicines.** Running out could cause problems with your medicine schedule. Check expiration dates frequently and discard any medicines that are out-of-date.



- **Keep all medicines out of the sight and reach of children and away from pets.** If children do visit your house, be extra cautious and have the phone number of the nearest poison control center handy.
- **Before you travel,** ask your doctor or pharmacist how to adjust your medicine schedule to account for changes in time zones, routine, and diet. Bring the phone numbers of your doctors and pharmacists with you. Carry a list of all the medications you take with you. When flying, carry your medicines with you; do not pack them in your checked luggage. Take enough medication with you in case you need to stay longer. When traveling, always keep medicines out of heat and direct sunlight.
- **Set timers and reminders to take your medicines, if needed.** Program clocks for when you are at home, and cell phones and watches when you are traveling.

#### Traveling with Prescription Medicati...



(Watch the video to learn more about traveling with prescription medications. To enlarge the video, click the brackets in the lower right-hand corner. To reduce the video, press the Escape (Esc) button on your keyboard.)

[Read more about ways to manage your medications at Eldercare.gov](#)

#### Your Pharmacist Is a Resource

Finally, the pharmacist is a good source of information about your medicines. In addition to answering questions and helping you select non-prescription medications, your pharmacist keeps records of all the prescriptions you get filled at that store.

Because the pharmacist keeps these records, it is a very good idea to have the same store fill your prescriptions whenever possible.

#### In Case of Accidental Poisoning

Be prepared in case of accidental poisoning involving medications or other substances. Call Poison Help at 1-800-222-1222 to speak with a poison expert at the poison center serving your area. The service is free and available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and calls are always free and confidential. Interpreter services are also available in 160 languages. Keep the number programmed in your home phone and mobile device.

For more information, visit the Poison Help website at [www.poisonhelp.hrsa.gov](http://www.poisonhelp.hrsa.gov)

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