

# Tips for managing your medications

## Working with your healthcare team

Used properly, medications can ease your health problem, improve your general condition, and even save your life. So it's important to monitor, use them correctly, and ensure they're up to date.

Below is a simple checklist to help you ensure that you're getting the full benefit from your prescribed medications.

- Read the label** on the package – every time.
- Follow directions carefully.** If you don't understand them, ask before you leave the pharmacy or call the pharmacy phone number on the prescription label.
- Ask if your medications need to be taken until fully completed.
- Ask your healthcare team\* about what activities you might need to stop doing while on your medication – like driving, or consuming alcohol or cannabis.
- Let your healthcare team know if you **don't feel well** after taking a prescription or non-prescription medication.
- Get help right away if you think you're experiencing **side effects\*** or **adverse reactions\*\*** (see page 2) to your medications.

**Note:** call 9-1-1 if you are having difficulty breathing or have other life-threatening symptoms. Otherwise, you can contact HealthLink at 8-1-1 for assistance in deciding where and when to get help with side effects or adverse reactions.

- Keep an up-to-date record of all the medication you take including prescription and non-prescription medications (including the dosage) as well as dietary supplements such as vitamins and herbal remedies.
- Know your medications.** If you take more than one, make sure you're able to tell them apart by size, shape, or colour.
- Take only your own medications and do not share your medication with others.
- Share your medication list with your healthcare team each time you visit.
- Ask your healthcare provider\*\* about the cost of medication when talking about treatment options. Your healthcare team can help you understand differences between no-name and name brand medications and the costs of each.
- Tell your healthcare team about your **allergies** (including new ones) and reactions you've had to medications in the past.
- Regularly ask your healthcare team if there are medications you no longer need. For more information, [visit \*\*deprescribingnetwork.ca\*\*](https://deprescribingnetwork.ca).
- Check the **expiry date** on medications. Take expired or unused medications to your pharmacy for safe disposal (do not save these).

**Side effects\*** are things medications might cause besides what they're supposed to do. Before you take any medication, your healthcare team should tell you about possible side effects and how long they might last. You could ask to have the medication changed if the side effects bother you. There might be another medication that suits you better. Discuss with your healthcare team which side effects you should report or be mindful of.

**Adverse reactions\*\*** are more serious than side effects and don't happen very often.

Examples include:

A severe allergic reaction with difficulty breathing, skin rash, itching, or swelling.

Feeling faint and having a racing heart.

Feeling sick to your stomach, throwing up, or severe diarrhea.

Depression to the point of considering suicide.

If you think you're having an adverse drug reaction, contact your healthcare team right away. In an emergency, dial 9-1-1.

## Need help with your medication?

**Start by calling your pharmacy. Call whenever:**

- You need help understanding your medications.
- You have questions about medications or herbal remedies.
- You want help making more informed and safe decisions about medications.
- You think you may be having side effects.
- You're pregnant or breastfeeding and have questions about the safety of medications or herbal products for your baby.



### Pharmacy staff are on your team:

- Ask them any questions you have about your prescription or non-prescription medications. They're experts. If you use one pharmacy for all your prescriptions, your pharmacist can look at your complete personal drug history to keep track of the medications you take.

### Here's what your pharmacy team can do for you:

- Help you get the most out of your medication by sharing important information about what it does and how to use it.
- Help you stay safe by telling you which activities, foods, prescription and non-prescription medications, and herbal remedies to avoid with your medications.
- Help you come up with a system to remember to take your medications and to take them at the right time.
- Tell you about special packaging that will work for you.

### Make your life easier:

- Ask your pharmacy team about medication reminder devices such as calendars, mini-alarms, or blister packs.
- For people who take several medications, pill boxes with various compartments (called dosettes) can help.
- You can also ask for pre-filled pill boxes or request bottles without childproof lids.
- Your pharmacy may be able to print large and/or flat labels to make your prescription instructions easier to read.
- Your pharmacy may offer free delivery of medications. Be sure to ask.

## Packaging can help:

### Blister pack

A blister pack is a method of packing medications where each dose is placed in a small plastic bubble and backed by a sheet of foil. Medications are organized by day, usually for up to a week at a time. When it's time to take the medication, you simply push the pill through the blister packing. That way, you can see which doses you've taken.



### Dosette

A dosette is a container where you can store and organize your medications into compartments for different times of the day (e.g., morning, noon, afternoon, or bedtime) usually for up to a week at a time. That way, you can see whether you've taken your last dose of medication.

You can fill it yourself or have it filled by a pharmacist – which is a good idea if you take many medications at different times of the day. Dosettes may also come with alarms that beep when it's time for your next dose.



### Non-childproof lids

Most medications are put in childproof containers. Childproof lids can be very difficult to open. If you're having trouble, ask your pharmacist for non-childproof lids. Remember to always keep medications away from children.

*\*Healthcare team refers to patients, their caregivers, and healthcare providers that come together to plan and coordinate a person's care.*

*\*\*Healthcare providers can include doctors, nurses, dentists, psychologists, physiotherapists, pharmacists, etc.*

