

TAKING PRESCRIPTIONS FAITHFULLY

There is more to taking a prescription successfully than swallowing a pill. It can be difficult to follow all of your prescription drug directions. Some prescriptions have dietary restriction. Others may require you to take them at specific times during the day. Some common reasons why you may have a hard time taking a prescription correctly include:

- The prescription is expensive.
- The symptoms change or go away.
- The prescription has unpleasant side effects.
- You do not understand why you need the prescription, how the prescription works and why there are specific instructions for taking it.

In order to maximize the effectiveness of the prescription and avoid harmful or costly interactions or side effects, you should understand a little bit about each medication you are taking and why you are taking it (see *Talking With Your Doctor*). Understanding your need for the prescription and how it works will help you to develop the regular habits to take the prescription successfully.

Drug Interactions

Due to changes in metabolism, muscle tissue, digestive changes, kidney and liver function, prescriptions you have taken for years may begin to affect you differently as you age. Keep these terms in mind when monitoring your reaction to a new medication:

- ▶ **Drug-drug interactions:** When two or more medicines react with each other to cause unwanted effects, or cause one medicine not to work as well or even make a medication stronger than it should be.
- ▶ **Drug-condition interactions:** When a medical condition you already have makes certain drugs potentially harmful.
- ▶ **Drug-food interactions:** Result from drugs reacting with foods or drinks, affecting the way either drugs or nutrients can be absorbed into the body.
- ▶ **Drug-alcohol interactions:** When the medicine you take reacts with an alcoholic drink, which may cause you to feel tired and slow your reactions.

Changing your behavior when taking prescription drugs is a multi-step process. If you are having trouble taking your prescriptions regularly, ask yourself “What is difficult about taking this medication?”

- *I have trouble affording it*—Studies show that most patients never ask their doctor “How much does this prescription cost?” And many doctors do not know the answer. There are many factors that make this a difficult question to answer and that influence how much you will pay at the pharmacy (such as whether or not you have prescription drug insurance, your co-pay costs, what type of drug it is, what tier it is on your insurance formulary and what pharmacy you go to). Often, individuals feel uncomfortable discussing finances with their doctors. **But because the cost of a drug is such an important part of being able to take it regularly and effectively, there is no reason not to talk to your doctor about cost.** For more information on cutting the costs of your prescription drugs, see the section *Getting the Best Value*.
- *I don't feel any different when taking the drug, my symptoms have gone away or have gotten worse*—Sometimes it is hard to tell when a prescription is working. If you take medications for a chronic condition such as diabetes or high blood pressure, you may not feel any different. Many medications work as a ‘preventative’, by preventing your symptoms or conditions from getting worse. Understanding your chronic conditions and which medications work to prevent your symptoms from worsening will aid in your ability to follow your drug regime.

Key Resources:

American Association of Poison control centers:
<http://www.aapcc.org/DNN/800.222.1222>

Updated Beers Criteria for Potentially Inappropriate Medication Use in Older Adults:
http://consultgerirn.org/uploads/File/trythis/issue16_1.pdf

Conversely, if you experience worsening symptoms or side effects that impact your ability to take the medication, it is important to record your observations and share them in detail with your doctor (see the section *Talking With Your Doctor*). You and your doctor can talk about what is causing the symptoms and side effects and if there is anything to do to minimize them.

This may result in taking a lower dose, changing *when* you take the prescription or taking a different medication all together.

- *The prescription is complicated to take—*
Especially when managing multiple medications, it becomes more difficult to observe all of the rules required by our prescriptions. Getting organized with your medications is the easiest way to maintain the habit of taking them faithfully.

The most important aspect of your drug routine is that it is manageable.

- Keep medications in plain sight in a cool, dry place like a kitchen counter or desktop. Never keep prescriptions in a bathroom where they can become damaged and less effective from shower steam or moisture.
- Set timers and reminders. Program clocks when you are at home and cell phones and watches when you are traveling. Or take advantage of medication tracker software for personal computers. See <http://www.consumerreports.org/health/medication-tracker/index.htm>.
- Avoid having to make last-minute refills. Mark your calendars in advance or look into a mail-order pharmacy, which can also be less expensive.
- Keep your medication record and original pill bottles within easy reach. These two tools will include all of your instructions for taking your prescriptions successfully.

Summary

In understanding your personal health needs and how your medications work for you, you will be better able to manage your personal health. Stay organized and keep your health care costs lower by faithfully and effectively taking your prescriptions.

Handouts:

- ▶ Taking Meds Faithfully