

To learn more about medication safety, you can refer to these documents at the following Web sites:

“Recommendations for Preventing Medication Errors”

www.ashp.org

“Use Medicine Safely”

and

“How to Give Medicine to Children”

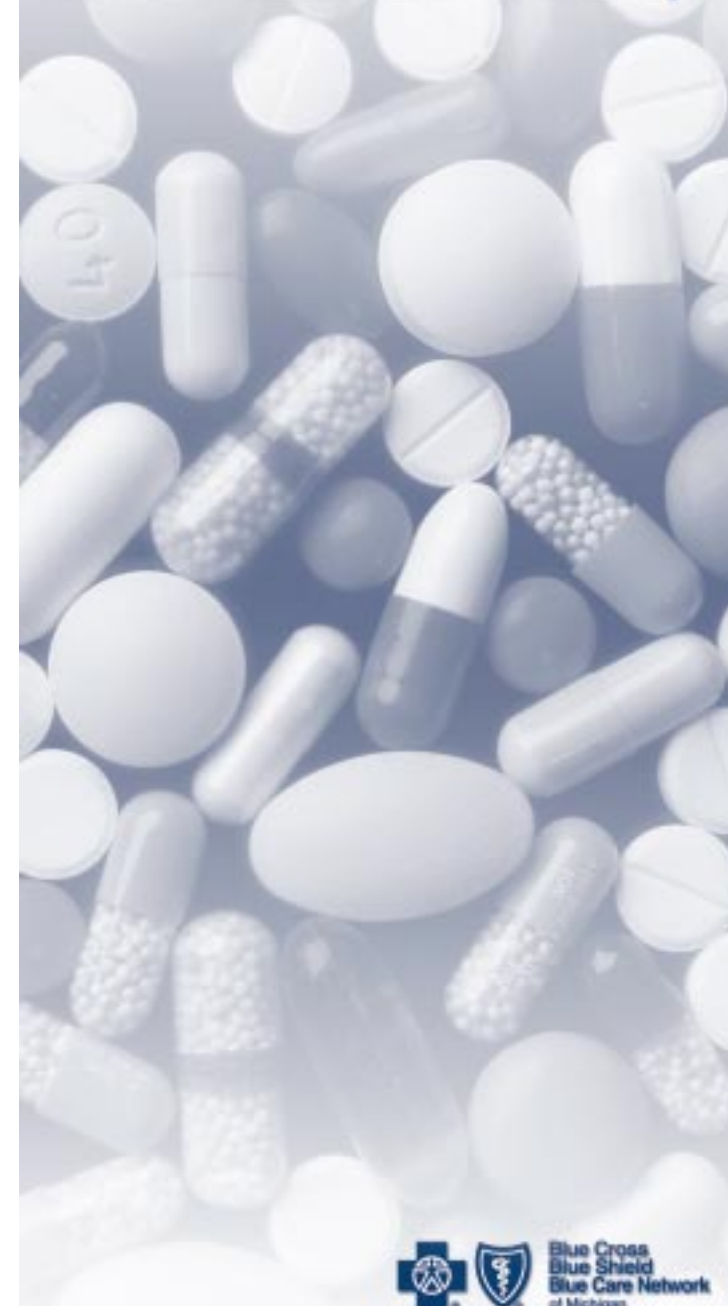
www.fda.gov

“How to Take Your Medications Safely”

www.ismp.org

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan
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Guidelines for Medication Safety



Ensuring the proper use of your prescriptions

Understanding and properly using your medications is an important part of managing your own health care. When taken properly, medications can help us in our daily lives, and they need to be taken exactly as directed by your doctor or pharmacist.

Your doctors, nurses and pharmacists form a professional medical team who are committed to helping you understand your medications and take them properly. Along with the medical team, you play an important part in your own care since you are responsible for taking your medications.

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan has developed this brochure to help you take your prescription medications safely.

Here are a few points to remember about medication safety:

- The medical team monitors your treatment once you start your medication. This includes checking to see if the medication is working and watching for possible side effects. It is important that you know what symptoms to look for so that you can recognize them and take recommended action when needed.
- The medical team should tell you everything you need to know about your medications and answer your questions.
- You also play a vital role. Know why you are taking the medication, how to take it and what to watch for as you take it.

What to do at the doctor's office or pharmacy:

When prescribing or dispensing medications, your doctor and pharmacist will need some important information from you:

- Be sure to tell them about any medications you are currently taking. Combining prescription medications

or prescription and over-the-counter medications could lead to possible drug interactions.

- Mention any herbal products, homeopathic remedies or vitamins. Since these items can interact with some medications, they should be treated like any other drug.
- If you take many medications, make a list to take with you on appointments.
- Inform your medical team of any food or drug allergies or reactions that you have had in the past.
- Notify your doctor and pharmacist if you are pregnant, nursing or trying to become pregnant.

Checklist

Before leaving the doctor's office, you should know:

- The name, strength and form of the medication prescribed
- Why you are taking the medication
- When and how to take it
- What to do if you miss a dose
- How long you'll be on the medication
- What to expect as side effects
- Whom to contact with questions

Dealing safely with your medications at home:

Here are some important steps you can follow in your own home to ensure the proper use of your prescription and over-the-counter medications:

- Check the expiration date on all medications, vitamins and herbal supplements. Do not take expired medications.

- Follow the recommendations on how to store your medications. Improper storage could make the medications less effective.
- Make sure that your name is on the label. Never take someone else's prescription, and never share your prescription medication with others.
- Keep all medications away from children.
- Take the medications exactly as prescribed by the doctor.
- Be alert for side effects:
 - If you notice any itching, swelling, difficulty breathing, chest pains, or sudden and unexplained muscle pain, stop taking the medication immediately, and seek medical attention.
 - If you experience other discomfort or your symptoms are minor, but bothersome, contact your doctor or pharmacist and tell them about it.

Checklist

Before taking your medication you should:

- Read the label. Make sure it is the right medication, the right strength and that the medication has not expired.
- Read the directions and make sure that they are not different than what the doctor or pharmacist told you. If they are, call your pharmacist immediately.
- If you just refilled the medication, make sure it looks the same as it did before. Call your pharmacist immediately if it looks different.
- Take the medication exactly as instructed by your doctor or pharmacist.
- If you are unsure about anything relating to your medications, contact your doctor or pharmacist.