

## How to improve Medication Adherence (FDA, PRxN-MPTN and William A Millar)

Medication adherence, or taking medications correctly, is generally defined as the extent to which patients take medication as prescribed by their doctors. This involves factors such as getting prescriptions filled, remembering to take medication on time, and understanding the directions.

Common barriers to medication adherence include

- the inability to pay for medications
- disbelief that the treatment is necessary or helping
- difficulty keeping up with multiple medications and complex dosing schedules
- confusion about how and when to take the medication

Poor adherence can interfere with the ability to treat many diseases, leading to greater complications from the illness and a lower quality of life for patients. Here are some examples of areas in which medication adherence can pose challenges, along with tips for taking medications correctly and talking with health care professionals about your questions and concerns.

### Taking Antibiotics

If you feel better and no longer have symptoms, you may think your illness is cured. But if you have a bacterial infection, this can be a dangerous assumption.

If the full course of antibiotics is not taken, a small number of bacteria are likely to still be alive. These surviving germs are likely to have some natural resistance to the antibiotic. As they multiply and spread, a new strain of resistant germs may begin to develop. This may be one way that Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA) infections occur. MRSA is a type of bacteria that's resistant to certain antibiotics.

It's important to use antibiotics appropriately and to take the medication exactly as directed.

- Take all doses of the antibiotic, even if the infection is getting better.
- Don't stop taking the antibiotic unless your doctor tells you to stop.
- Don't share antibiotics with others.
- Don't save unfinished antibiotics for another time.

### Tips for Consumers

**Communicate with your health care professional.** If medication side effects are bothering you, talk with your doctor or pharmacist about what you can do to lessen the problem. You might be able to switch to a different medication or your doctor may be able to adjust the timing of your dose. **Make sure you understand how long to take the medication.** Some questions to ask when you're prescribed a new medication are:

- Is it necessary to empty the bottle, or can I stop taking this medication once I feel better?
- Will I need to get a refill, or can I stop treatment when the bottle is empty?

**Tell your doctor if paying for prescription drugs is a problem.** Your doctor may be able to prescribe a generic medication or offer other suggestions to offset the cost of a drug. Generic drugs use the same active ingredients and are shown to work the same way in the body, but they can cost 30 percent to 80 percent less. Generics also have the same risks and benefits as their brand-name counterparts.

You can also shop around your neighborhood or legitimate online pharmacies for the best prices on prescription drugs. For useful information about finding a legitimate online pharmacy.

You can also:

- Check to see whether you are eligible for drug assistance programs in your state.
- Check with the pharmaceutical companies that manufacture your medicines to find out whether you qualify for assistance.

**Set daily routines to take medication.** It can be helpful to connect taking the medication with normal, daily activities such as eating meals or going to bed. You can also keep backup supplies of your medication at your workplace or in your briefcase or purse.

**Keep medications where you'll notice them.** For a medication that should be taken with food, place that medication on the dinner table or TV tray, or wherever you eat on a regular basis. If there are medications you need to take in the morning, put those medications in your bathroom, next to your toothbrush or your deodorant, or something else that you use as part of your morning routine.

**Use daily dosing containers.** These are available at most pharmacies and allow you to keep medications in compartments that are labeled with the days of the week and various dosage frequencies.

**Keep a written or computerized schedule.** This can cover the medications you take, how often you take them, and any special directions. Thanks to modern technology, there are a number of devices that have been designed to help patients adhere to a prescribed medication schedule. These include medication reminder pagers and wristwatches, automatic pill dispensers, and even voice-command medication managers. Ask your pharmacist for suggestions as to which particular devices may be helpful for you.

### **Tips for Talking with Your Pharmacist to learn how to use medicines safely**

#### **Use these tips for talking with your pharmacist.**

Your pharmacist can help you learn how to use your prescription and nonprescription (over-the-counter) medicines safely and to increase the benefits and decrease the risks. You can also use these tips when talking with your other healthcare professionals.

#### **Tell your pharmacist**

Tell your pharmacist...

- everything you use. Keep a record and give it to your pharmacist. Make sure you put all the prescription and nonprescription medicines, vitamins, herbals, and other supplements you use. Your pharmacist will use this to keep his/her records up-to-date and help you use medicine safely.
- if you've had any allergic reactions or problems with medicines, medicines with dietary supplements, medicines with food, or medicines with other treatments.
- anything that could affect your use of medicine, such as, if you have trouble swallowing, reading labels, remembering to use medicine, or paying for medicine.
- before you start using something new. Your pharmacist can help you avoid medicines, supplements, foods, and other things that don't mix well with your medicines.

## Ask your pharmacist

- What are the brand and generic (non-brand) names?
- What is the active ingredient? Can I use a generic?
- What is this for, and how is it going to help me?
- How and when should I use it? How much do I use?
- How long should I use it? Can I stop using the medicine or use less if I feel better?
- What should I do if I miss a dose? I use too much?
- Will this take the place of anything else I am using?
- When will the medicine start working? How should I expect to feel?
- Are there any special directions for using this?
- Should I avoid any other medicines, dietary supplements, drinks, foods, activities, or other things?
- Is there anything I should watch for, like allergic reactions or side effects? What do I do if I get any?
- Will I need any tests to check the medicine's effects (blood tests, x-rays, other)? When will I need those?
- How and where should I keep this medicine?
- Is there a medication guide or other patient information for this medicine?
- Where and how can I get more written information?

## After you have the medicine, and before you leave the pharmacy

- **Look to be sure you have the right medicine.** If you've bought the medicine before, make sure this medicine has the same shape, color, size, markings, and packaging. Anything different? Ask your pharmacist. If it seems different when you use it, tell your pharmacist, doctor, or other healthcare professional.
- **Be sure you know the right dose for the medicine and you know how to use it.** Any questions? Ask your pharmacist.
- **Make sure there is a measuring spoon, cup, or syringe for liquid medicine.** If the medicine doesn't come with a special measuring tool, ask your pharmacist about one. (Spoons used for eating and cooking may give the wrong dose. Don't use them.)
- **Be sure you have any information the pharmacist can give you about the medicine.** Read it and save it.
- **Get the pharmacy phone number,** so you can call back.