

MEDfacts

An Educational Health Series From National Jewish Health®



MANAGING YOUR MEDICATION SUPPLY

Managing your medications is a very important task. When you take medication as prescribed, your disease can be controlled. Your health care provider will give you specific information about your medications. Learning about your medications and following the guidelines listed below will help you manage your disease.

Understanding Your Medications

- Learn about the medications you are taking. Know the **brand** name and **generic** name of your medications. Learn the medication's action, dose, when to take it and what side effects to watch for. Ask about any drug, food or herbal interactions.
- Talk with your health care provider about the use of generic (non-brand name) substitutes. Some generic medications are **not** recommended.
- If your prescription does not look right, ask your health care provider.
- Keep your medications in the original bottle. The original bottle has the correct label and instructions. But for the times you cannot, ask your pharmacist for an extra labeled container. School health policies require that all medications have an original pharmacy label.
- **Do not** substitute over-the-counter (OTC) medications for the medications your health care provider has prescribed. These medications can be dangerous. For example OTC bronchodilators (i.e., Primatine® Mist, Bronkaid®) may contain epinephrine and/or theophylline which can interact with the medications your health care provider has prescribed.
- Most people with lung diseases can use over-the-counter decongestants and anti-histamines safely. It is important to talk with your health care provider. He or she can recommend these types of medications.
- When your medications change, be sure to keep your old medications separate.

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- If you have trouble swallowing medications, ask about different ways to take your medications.

Remembering to Take Your Medications

- **Develop a daily routine for taking your medications.** Pick something you do everyday (i.e., waking, brushing your teeth, eating meals, bedtime) and plan your medication schedule around that activity.
- **Use a medication checklist or worksheet to record when you take medications.** Place the checklist someplace visible to use as a reminder. Children may enjoy using stars or stickers.
- **Pill boxes can help you remember to take your medications.** By packing a day or a week's worth of medication you will know if you took your medication or not. However, once the medication leaves the original bottle, it loses its identification and instruction label. You may want to have someone double check your pill box to make sure it is packed correctly.

Refilling Your Prescriptions

- When you get your medication, make sure the number of refills on the label matches the number on the original prescription. Ask the pharmacist at the time if you notice a problem. Plan to get a new prescription when you are on your last refill - or sooner.
- Contact your pharmacy well in advance of the time you need your medication. The pharmacist may need time to telephone the physician, check the medication supply, order the medication, then package and label the medication.
- Most prescriptions, including refills, are only good for 12 months. At that time, a new prescription is necessary and any unused refills cannot be filled.

When Is Your Metered-Dose-Inhaler Empty?

- Some metered-dose-inhalers have a counter to determine when the device is empty. If the metered-dose inhaler does not have a counter, it's a good idea to write on each inhaler the date you/your child starts using it. Figure out how long the medicine will last. To do this, look at the canister. The canister of your metered-dose-inhaler is marked with the number of puffs in the canister. Divide this number by the number of puffs you/your child takes each day. The answer is the number of days the metered-dose-inhaler will last. Look at a calendar to count out the number of days. Write the date you need to stop using the inhaler on the inhaler; along with the date you start using the inhaler. Then plan ahead so that you get a new inhaler before the old one is used up.

What about the dry powder inhaler device?

- Some dry powder devices have some type of counter attached to the device to determine when the device is empty. Some dry powder devices have capsules.

Checking For Expiration Dates

- Look at the expiration date on all medication packages.
- Make sure you check expiration dates on the medications you may have stored in

different locations (i.e., work desk, school, purse, backpack, kitchen cabinet).

- **Do not** use any medications after they expire.

Storing Your Medications

- Temperature changes and humidity can cause medication to become ineffective **or** dangerous.
- Humidity can cause a tablet to become moist and powdery. Do not store medications in places with high humidity, like gym lockers, bathrooms and above the stove.
- Do not store medications in the glove compartment of your car. The temperature can range from -20°F to 120°F. When too cold to too hot, your MDI will not deliver a good spray and may burst. Check your MDI label for the recommended temperature range.

Traveling with Medications

- When you travel, make sure you have more than enough medications.
- Put your medications in your carry-on luggage.
- Be cautious about using foreign purchased medications.

Note: This information is provided to you as an educational service of National Jewish. It is not meant to be a substitute for consulting with your own physician.

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