



# Check Your Medicines

## Tips for Using Medicines Safely

**Bring a list or a bag with ALL your medicines when you go to your doctor's office, the pharmacy, or the hospital.**

Include all prescription and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements that you use. If your doctor prescribes a new medicine, ask if it is safe to use with your other medicines. Remind your doctor and pharmacist if you are allergic to any medicines.

**Ask questions about your medicines.**

Ask questions and make sure you understand the answers. Choose a pharmacist and doctor you feel comfortable talking with about your health and medicines. Take a relative or friend with you to ask questions and remind you about the answers later. Write down the answers.

**Make sure your medicine is what the doctor ordered.**

Does the medicine seem different than what your doctor wrote on the prescription or look different than what you expected? Does a refill look like it is a different shape, color, or size than what you were given before? If something seems wrong, ask the pharmacist to double-check it. Most errors are first found by patients.

**Ask how to use the medicine correctly.**

Read the directions on the label and other information you get with your medicine. Have the pharmacist or doctor explain anything you do not understand. Are there other medicines, foods, or activities (such as driving, drinking alcohol, or using tobacco) that you should avoid while using the medicine? Ask if you need lab tests to check how the medicine is working or to make sure it doesn't cause harmful side effects.

**Ask about possible side effects.**

Side effects can occur with many medicines. Ask your doctor or pharmacist what side effects to expect and which ones are serious. Some side effects may bother you but will get better after you have been using the medicine for a while. Call your doctor right away if you have a serious side effect or if a side effect does not get better. A change in the medicine or the dose may be needed.

Simple checks could save your life!

**Visit:**

[www.ahrq.gov/consumer/](http://www.ahrq.gov/consumer/)

[www.fda.gov/usemedicinesafely/](http://www.fda.gov/usemedicinesafely/)



AHRQ Pub. No. 10-M052-C  
(Replaces 08-M044-A)  
September 2010