

Things you can do to prevent medication mistakes

Medication mistakes happen every day — at the doctor's office, hospital, even at home. Some mistakes are more serious than others, but all medication mistakes can be prevented. Here are some basic things you can do to help prevent a medication mistake from happening to you or your loved ones.



Joint Commission
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Setting the Standard for Quality in Health Care

At the doctor's office and pharmacy

- Share with your doctor a list of your current medicines, vitamins, herbs and supplements.
- Whenever you get a new medicine, remind your doctor about allergies you have, or negative reactions you have had to other medicines.
- If you are taking a lot of medicines, ask your doctor if it is safe to take those medicines together. Do the same thing with vitamins, herbs and other supplements.
- Understand that more medications may not always be better for you. Ask your doctor how a new medication will help.
- Make sure you can read the handwriting on prescriptions. If you can't read it, the pharmacist may not be able to either. You can ask to have the prescription printed.
- Read the label on your prescription medicine. Make sure it has your name on it and the correct medicine name. Some medicines have similar names that can be confused.
- If you're not sure whether you are supposed to swallow or chew your medicine, ask your doctor or pharmacist. Also, ask your doctor or pharmacist whether you can cut or crush a medicine.
- Ask your doctor or pharmacist if it's safe to drink alcohol with your medicine.
- Take your medicine as it is prescribed and do not stop taking it without asking your doctor.
- Whenever you are in doubt about a medicine, ask your doctor or pharmacist about it.

At the hospital and clinic

- Share with your doctor a list of your current medicines, vitamins, herbs and supplements.
- Make sure the doctor or nurse checks your wristband and asks your name before giving you medicine.
- Ask your doctor or nurse how a new medicine will help. Ask for written information about it, including its brand and generic names.
- Ask your doctor or nurse about the possible side effects of your medicines.
- Don't be afraid to tell the nurse or the doctor if you think you are about to get the wrong medicine.
- Know what time you normally get a medicine. If you don't get it then, tell your nurse or doctor.
- Tell your nurse or doctor if you don't feel well after receiving a medicine. If you think you are having a reaction or experiencing side effects, ask for help immediately.
- If you're not feeling well enough to ask questions about your medicines, ask a relative or friend to ask questions for you and to help make sure you get and take the right medicines.
- If you receive intravenous (IV) fluids, read the contents of the bags of IV fluids. If you're not well enough to do this, ask a relative or friend to do it.
- If you are given an IV, ask the nurse how long it should take for the liquid to run out. Tell the nurse if it seems to be dripping too fast or too slow.
- Ask for a copy of your medication administration record. This lists all of the drugs you should be taking. Check it for accuracy. If you're not well enough to do this, ask a friend or relative to help.
- Before you leave the hospital or clinic, make sure that you understand all of the instructions for the medicines you will need to keep taking, and ask any questions you may have about any of your medicines.

