

## Drugs and Medications: Maximize the Benefits / Minimize the Dangers

Think for a moment. What do all of these have in common?

- **Prescription drugs / medicines** you take.
- **Over-the-counter health products** you take – including example, pain relievers, allergy medicines, laxatives, milk of magnesia, antacids, nicotine products, etc. to name a few.
- **Vitamins and herbal products** you take.
- **Skin care products** you use, especially those that have active ingredients – including lotions, ointments, salves, powders.
- **Beverages** you drink – including caffeine products, alcohol, etc.
- **Products you inhale** - including cigarettes, inhalants, etc.
- **Foods** you eat.



They all go in or on your body. Or, in the case of your loved-one, in or on his/her body.

You may be asking yourself, “*Now that I think about it...how do all these things interact with each other, anyway?*” The answer is: sometimes they do, and sometimes they don’t. And when they don’t, the combinations can sometimes lead to very serious problems.

To lessen your worries about problems like this, here are four things you can do to keep yourself and your loved-ones safe.

- ❶ In preparation for *each and every* medical appointment, find a sturdy bag and toss in all of the prescription bottles, vitamin and herb containers, over-the-counter medicines, skin products – the whole works. The rule of thumb is: When in doubt, toss it in.
- ❷ Bring the bag of products with you to *each and every* medical appointment.
- ❸ With products on hand, ask your doctor(s) to review them.
- ❹ Fill your prescriptions at one pharmacy. By doing this, your prescription drug / medication records are in *one place*.

Keep yourself and your loved-one safe. Always talk openly with your doctor and pharmacist and include them as active members of your health team!

**An added benefit of using one pharmacy is that your pharmacist should be able to print out a “master list” of medications for you or your loved one. Such a “master list” can be very useful to you in two ways. First, bring this list (along with your sturdy bag of products) to each and every doctor’s appointment. Second, this “master list” can also save you or your loved one’s life during a health emergency. How? “Is this person taking any medications?” is one of the first questions asked by medical emergency personnel. For added protection, carry a copy of the “master list” with you and post one on your refrigerator door!**

---

## Questions to Ask Your Doctor When You or Your Loved-One are Prescribed a Drug or Medication

---



### ***To understand the reason your doctor prescribed the drug / medicine, ask...***

- Why is this medication necessary?
- What specific symptoms does this medication treat?
- How will this drug help me?
- What is the likelihood that it will help me?
- How long will it be before this medication begins to help?

### ***To understand the benefits and risks, ask...***

- How can I tell if the medication is working?
- What specific symptoms will it relieve?
- What are the other possible benefits?
- What are the possible risks?
- What are the risks of *not* taking this medication?

### ***To understand the side effects and how it may interfere with work, etc, ask...***

- What are the possible side effects?
- Will this medication make me drowsy or sleepy?
- Will it affect my ability to work?
- Will this medication affect my ability to drive or operate machinery?
- How will I know if the medication is not working?
- What side effects would necessitate a call to the doctor?

### ***To understand how to get the best results, ask...***

- How often must this drug be taken?
- Is there a preferred time of day or night for taking it?
- Does this medication need to be taken with – or without – food?
- How should I store my medication?

### ***To understand the precautions, ask...***

- Is there any danger from skipping a dose, or from taking a double dose?
- What are the risks of overdosing?
- How will this react with the other prescription I am taking?
- How will this react with the over-the-counter medications, herbs or vitamins I am taking?
- Should I avoid alcohol, caffeine or nicotine while on this medication?
- Should I avoid certain foods while taking this medication?
- Should I limit my activity in any way?
- Is this medication habit forming or addictive?

### ***To understand the course of the treatment, ask...***

- Is this the lowest dose and if not, why?
- How long will I have to take this medication?
- When should I refill my prescription?

### ***To understand the alternatives to medications, ask...***

- Are there other treatment options besides medicating?
- Is there a generic drug I could take that would have the same effect and cost less?
- Is there a medication that would treat more than one condition?
- If this medication doesn't work, what else might you consider prescribing?

