

## Weigh the benefits and risks: Educate yourself

- Learn the facts about all medicines and supplements before making a treatment decision. Advice from your doctor or pharmacist can help you make the right decision.
- Don't skip doses or take half doses to save money. Talk with your doctor or pharmacist if you can't afford the prescribed medicines — there may be other options or special programs to help with the costs of certain drugs.

## Take an active role in your health care

Medication is one of the most important tools in promoting health and preventing illness and disability. Medicines improve your quality of life so you can participate in the activities you enjoy most. However, if not used properly, medicines can also cause harm. Among seniors, the risk of medication-related problems is greater due to the large number of medications prescribed. Because seniors have more chronic diseases and multiple conditions, they use more medications and are more likely to try dietary and herbal remedies.

Your doctor, pharmacist and nurse are committed to helping you understand your medications and take them properly. Along with your medical team, you play an important part in your own health care since you are responsible for taking your medications.

## Here are a few points to remember about medication safety:

- **You play a vital role in medication safety.** Know why you are taking the medication, how to take it and what side effects to watch for.
- **Your doctor, pharmacist and nurse are your resources for information.** Your medical team can tell you what you need to know about your medications and answer your questions.
- **Talk to your doctor, pharmacist or nurse whenever you experience something that doesn't seem right after taking medication.** The information you share is vital to making the right changes at the right time to keep small problems from becoming bigger. Also, tell your medical team whether or not the medicine is working for you.

### To learn more, visit the following websites:

*Institute for Safe Medication Practices*  
[www.ismp.org/consumers/default.asp](http://www.ismp.org/consumers/default.asp)

*Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality*  
[www.ahrq.gov/consumer/safemeds/safemeds.htm](http://www.ahrq.gov/consumer/safemeds/safemeds.htm)

*Safe Medication.com*  
[www.safemedication.com](http://www.safemedication.com)



Nonprofit corporations and independent licensees  
of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association

BCBSM maintains [www.bcbsm.com](http://www.bcbsm.com), [www.MiBCN.com](http://www.MiBCN.com),  
[www.hcbo.com](http://www.hcbo.com) and [www.theunadvertisedbrand.com](http://www.theunadvertisedbrand.com).  
The Blues do not control any other websites referenced in this  
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# Medication Safety

**When it comes to  
medicines, play it SAFE:**

- Speak Up
- Ask Questions
- Find Facts
- Educate Yourself

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan  
Blue Care Network of Michigan

[www.bcbsm.com](http://www.bcbsm.com)  
[www.MiBCN.com](http://www.MiBCN.com)



## What to do at the doctor's office or pharmacy: **Speak up**

Help your doctor and pharmacist get the information they need:

- Tell them about any medications you're currently taking. Combining prescription medications or prescription and over-the-counter medications could lead to possible drug interactions.
- Mention any herbal products, homeopathic remedies or vitamins. Since these items can interact with some medications, they should be treated like any other drug.
- If you take several medications, make a list to take with you to appointments.
- Inform your medical team of any food or drug allergies or reactions you have had in the past.
- Mention your eating habits. Tell them if you follow or have recently changed to a special diet. Tell them how much coffee, tea or alcohol you drink each day and whether you smoke. These things may affect the way your medicine works.

## Before leaving the doctor's office and pharmacy: **Ask questions**

### **You should know:**

- The name, strength and form of the medication prescribed
- Why you are taking the medication
- When and how to take or use your medication
- What to do if you miss a dose
- How long you'll be on the medication
- What side effects to expect
- Who to contact with questions

### **The 5 RIGHTS to remember**

- The RIGHT medicine
- For the RIGHT patient
- In the RIGHT amount
- At the RIGHT time
- In the RIGHT way (for example, swallowing instead of chewing a pill)

## Safely handling your medications at home: **Find facts**

Here are some important steps to follow to ensure the proper use of your medications and supplements:

- Check the expiration date on all medications, vitamins and herbal supplements. Don't take expired medications.
- Follow the storage recommendations on your medications. Improper storage — too hot, too cold or exposed to light — could make them less effective or even unsafe.
- To protect our environment and water supply, properly dispose of medical waste (such as used syringes or patches) and medicines you no longer need.
- Make sure that your name is on the label. Never take someone else's prescription, and never share your prescription medication with others.
- Keep your medications in a different room than your spouse's or partner's and away from children or pets.
- Don't take medicines in the dark. Turn your light on before reaching for the medicine. Take your medicine in the exact amount and at the times your doctor prescribes.
- Take your medicine until it is finished or until your doctor says it is OK to stop. Use a memory aid like a calendar or pill box to take your medications on time.
- Be alert for side effects:
  - If you notice any itching, swelling, difficulty breathing, chest pains, or sudden and unexplained muscle pain, stop taking the medication immediately and seek medical attention.
  - If you experience other discomfort or your symptoms are minor but bothersome, contact your doctor or pharmacist and tell him or her about it.