



Pharmaceutical  
Society of Australia



# Wise use of medicines

**Medicines can help to restore or maintain health, but if used incorrectly, they can cause serious problems. Ask your doctor and pharmacist for information and advice about your medicines and how to use them safely and wisely.**

## Types of medicines

The manufacture, packaging, labelling, storage, possession and sale of medicines are controlled by law. In Australia medicines are regulated according to their safety and are classified or scheduled as:

**Prescription Only Medicines** – which may be supplied to the public by a pharmacist, on presentation of a prescription written by a medical doctor or sometimes a dentist

**Pharmacist Only Medicines** – which may be supplied to the public by a pharmacist, who must recommend or approve their use

**Pharmacy Medicines** – which may be supplied to the public by pharmacies. A pharmacist must be available to give advice, when needed

**Unscheduled medicines – including Complementary Medicines** – which may be supplied to the public by any supplier. Complementary medicines include herbal or alternative medicines, aromatherapy products, vitamins and minerals.

## Benefits and risks

Used wisely, medicines can play an important role in helping to prevent and treat illness or relieve uncomfortable symptoms. All medicines work best when combined with a healthy diet and lifestyle.

When using any type of medicine, there is always a risk that the medicine may cause unwanted or adverse effects.

Things that increase the risk of adverse effects from a medicinal product include:

- Using the wrong dose or wrong directions
- Using other medicines at the same time
- Drinking alcohol, smoking or using illicit drugs
- Using someone else's medicine

- Certain medical conditions (e.g., kidney or liver problems)
- Pregnancy and breastfeeding
- Allergy to any of the ingredients.

## Understanding medicines

Your doctor and pharmacist aim to recommend the most appropriate medicines for your circumstances. If you are worried about or are having problems with your medicines, ask them for more information and advice.

When choosing a medicine for yourself, find out as much as you can about its effects. Ask a pharmacist or doctor for advice.

## Some questions to ask the doctor:

- What is my diagnosis?
- How long is my condition likely to last?
- What medicine have you prescribed and what does it do?
- How should I use it?
- Should I expect to feel any different while using it?
- When should I have it reviewed or stop using it?
- Do I need any regular monitoring or tests (e.g., blood tests) while on this medicine?

## Some questions to ask the pharmacist:

- What is the **drug name** and the **brand name** of this medicine? The same drug may have several different brand names.
- How does this medicine work?
- How much of this medicine should I use and how often should I use it?
- What time of day should I use it?
- How do I use, apply or insert the device (e.g., inhaler, patch, suppository)?

- What adverse effects do I need to watch for and what should I do if I get an adverse effect?
- What can I do to reduce the chance of adverse effects?
- Will it interact with other medicines or food?
- Can I drink alcohol while using this medicine?
- What should I do if I miss a dose?
- Can I have a copy of the Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) leaflet for this medicine?

## Important

Pharmacists can help people to manage their medicines safely. Pharmacy services include:

- Information and advice on medicines, medical conditions, health care and health-care aids
- Packing tablets into weekly blister packs (e.g., *Websterpak*). This often helps people with memory problems or poor vision and those with complicated medicine regimens
- Maintaining a customised *MediList and Health Record* card, containing details of all medicines taken and a chart to follow
- Home Medicines Review (HMR) – a pharmacist can visit you at home to review all your medicines. An HMR must be arranged through your doctor.

## Self care

- Check the drug name of your medicine, as well as the brand name - so you do not mistakenly use different brands of the same medicine at the same time.
- Check the strength of your medicine.
- Read ALL labels and follow directions carefully.
- Use a standard medicine measure for all liquid medicines.
- Shake liquids and aerosols (puffers) well before taking dose.
- Swallow tablets or capsules with a full glass of water. Do not swallow tablets lying down.
- Some tablets should not be crushed. If you have difficulty swallowing, ask your pharmacist for advice.

Your **Self Care** Pharmacist

- If you want to stop taking a medicine, check with your pharmacist or doctor first.
- If you want to change the time or dose of a medicine, check with your pharmacist or doctor first.
- If you plan to take a new medicine, check with your pharmacist or doctor first – especially if you are already taking other medicines, or if you are pregnant or breastfeeding.
- Unless your doctor tells you otherwise, always take the full course of medicine that you are prescribed.
- Do not use other people's medicines or give your medicines to other people.
- Review your medicines with your doctor and pharmacist regularly. Tell your doctor and pharmacist about all the medicines you are using, including natural and herbal medicines and medicines from the supermarket or pharmacy.

## Storage

- Keep medicines in their original labelled containers.
- Store medicines in a cool dry place out of reach and sight of children. Follow any specific storage directions for your medicines.
- Return all out-of-date or unwanted medicines to a pharmacy for safe disposal. Do not put unwanted medicines down the toilet or drain or in a garbage bin.

## For more information

**'Medimate' medicines information brochure** – from your pharmacist or website [www.medimate.org.au](http://www.medimate.org.au)

**Consumer Medicine Information (CMI)** leaflets – your pharmacist can advise on availability.

**NPS Medicines Line** – phone 1300 888 763 Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm EST.

**The Poisons Information Centre** – in case of poisoning phone 131 126 from anywhere in Australia.

Pharmacists are medicines experts. Ask a pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.

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