



NATIONAL PATIENT SAFETY FOUNDATION® (NPSF)

Pharmacy Safety and Service – What You Should Expect:

A Consumer Fact Sheet

Your pharmacist and his/her staff are an important step in the medication use system. The pharmacist and his/her pharmacy technicians must concentrate on understanding the physician's order, typing the order accurately into the computer record, identifying potential problems with the prescription that the physician may have missed, picking the correct drug and strength from the shelf, and placing the drug in and the label on the same container. The system of checks and double checks is designed to help optimize the safety of patients.

You are part of that team every time you take your medications. It is very important that you also have double checked that you are taking the right drug, at the right time, the right dose, the correct way. To accomplish this, you need to know about your medications. Your pharmacist is available to provide this information. Below are additional tips for working with your pharmacist.

When dropping off prescriptions or requesting refills:

- Tell your pharmacist all the medications and over-the-counter drugs you take - especially those vitamins and herbal remedies purchased at health food or grocery stores, nutrition or smoothie shops. Your pharmacist has references that identify potential drug interactions.
- Confirm that the computer has your current prescription benefit information, allergies and/or drug intolerances, and phone number.
- Find out how many refills you can get. Make sure that your physician has provided enough refills until your next visit. Prescriptions and refills are only valid for one year.
- Call ahead for refills. You should expect to have your prescription ready if you call to refill 24 hours ahead of time.

When picking up your medications at your pharmacy:

- Confirm the drug is correct at the pharmacy counter. Compare the instructions given by your physician to the drug name on the pharmacy label.
- Open the bottle and look at the medications to confirm that the medications are imprinted with the correct drug name and strength. If there is no imprint, ask the pharmacist technician or the pharmacist to see the bottle to compare the drugs in your bottle to the drugs in the bottle from which the medications were dispensed. Also learn what your medications look like if you take them over a period of time.
- Liquids usually have a unique scent. Learn to recognize your liquid medications by smell.
- Confirm the dosage is correct. Compare the instructions given by your physician to the instructions on the pharmacy label.
 - Pediatric medications are at high risk for dosage errors. Most drugs' dosages are based on weight. Confirm your child's medication dose with your child's doctor and/or pharmacist.

Know about your medications:

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All new prescriptions must be dispensed with verbal and written pharmacist instructions. Because your physician or office nurse may have provided information, most pharmacists will use the “Listening Method” for providing drug information. When receiving your medication, make sure that you understand all of the information below:

- What did your physician tell you the medication was for?
- What are both names of your medication (generic and “brand” name)?
 - Trade name—the manufacturer gives the medication (brand name).
 - Generic name—the national chemical name.
- What will the medicine do?
- How did your physician tell you to take the medication?
 - How many times a day?
 - How much to take at one time?
 - How long to take the medicine?
 - How to take the medication (with water, juice, etc.)?
 - When to take the medication (before or after meals)?
- What did the physician tell you to expect from the medication?
 - What results to look for?
 - What to do about possible side effects?
 - What monitoring will be need to be done?
- How should you store the medication?
- How do you refill the medication if necessary?

Maintain a list of your medications and the times of day you take each medication. This drug list and schedule of doses is critical in keeping your medications organized. Ask your pharmacist to review your medication list and schedule.