

# Splitting Pills: What You Should Know

## Pill-splitting may save you money.

Some pills can be cut in half with a pill-splitting tool. Sometimes this is a way to save money—because you get two pills for the price of one. Often, you pay about the same price for different strengths of a drug.

The cost savings can make a difference, especially if you take the same pill every day, like a pill for high blood pressure.

## Not all pills can be split.

**Always ask your doctor or pharmacist** if it is safe to split your pills.

It is usually okay to split drugs that treat:

- High cholesterol (“statins”)
- High blood pressure
- Depression

But some drugs should never be split. For example, the pain medicine oxycodone (OxyContin) is released over time in the body. If you split it, you could get an overdose.

## Is pill-splitting safe?

Splitting pills is safe if:

- Your doctor or pharmacist agrees that it’s a good idea for you.
- You do it correctly.
- You only split pills that can safely be split.

Many insurance companies favor pill-splitting in order to cut costs. Most drug companies oppose it. But studies have not shown that people have health problems from splitting pills.

For many years, doctors advised people to split pills because the pills didn’t come in the dose needed. Now, more people are splitting pills to save on costs.

## Our advice:

**Talk to your doctor or pharmacist** before splitting pills to save money. Talk to a pharmacist if you want to split over-the-counter medicines.

Sometimes it is dangerous to split pills. There is no official, complete list of medicines that can be split.

## You can usually split these pills

• Amlodipine (Norvasc)	• Levothyroxine (Synthroid)	• Paroxetine (Paxil)
• Atenolol (Tenormin)	• Lisinopril (Zestril)	• Pravastatin (Pravachol)
• Atorvastatin (Lipitor)	• Lovastatin (Mevacor)	• Quinapril (Accupril)
• Citalopram (Celexa)	• Metformin (Glucophage)	• Rosuvastatin (Crestor)
• Clonazepam (Klonopin)	• Metoprolol (Toprol)	• Sertraline (Zoloft)
• Doxazosin (Cardura)	• Nefazodone (Serzone)	• Sildenafil (Viagra)
• Finasteride (Proscar)	• Olanzapine (Zyprexa)	• Simvastatin (Zocor)

## DON'T split these pills

- Oxycodone (OxyContin) for pain
- Omeprazole (Prilosec) for heartburn
- Cetirizine (Zyrtec) for allergies
- Chemotherapy drugs and anti-seizure medicines
- Birth control pills
- Blood thinners (Coumadin, warfarin)
- Capsules containing powders or gels
- Pills with hard outside coatings or coatings to protect your stomach
- Pills that release the drug throughout the day (extended-release)
- Pills that crumble easily
- Pills that irritate the mouth or taste bitter
- Pills with strong dyes that could stain your teeth and mouth

Thinking about pill-splitting? Ask your doctor or pharmacist about it first.



## How to split pills safely:

- **First, ask your doctor or pharmacist if a pill you take can be safely split.**
- **Then, ask your doctor to prescribe a dose that is twice your regular dose.**
- If your pills are safe to split, ask the pharmacist to show you how.
- **Split the pill at the time you are taking it.** Take the second half the next day.
- **Do not split pills ahead of time.** Pills can crumble when exposed to air and moisture.
- **Use a pill-splitter.** It is safer and more accurate than a knife. Pill-splitters cost from \$3 to \$10 at pharmacies. Some can cut odd-shaped pills. Some health plans cover pill-splitters.
- Only split pills once, into two halves. Don't split a pill twice.
- You may need help to split pills accurately if you have:
  - Poor eyesight
  - Shaking hands
  - Arthritis or Parkinson's disease
  - Memory or thinking problems

## Pill-Splitting Savings—Some Examples

Medicine & Daily Dose	Average Monthly Cost <sup>1</sup>	Average Monthly Cost with Split Pills	How Much You Might Save with Split Pills <sup>2</sup>
<b>Lovastatin</b> (Mevacor) 10 mg	\$33	\$18.50	\$14.50
<b>Atorvastatin</b> (Lipitor) 40 mg	\$124	\$61.50	\$62.50
<b>Amlodipine</b> (Norvasc) 5 mg	\$55	\$36.50	\$18.50
<b>Sertraline</b> (Zoloft) 50 mg	\$98	\$49.00	\$49.00
<b>Metoprolol</b> (Toprol) 200 mg	\$69	\$34.50	\$9.50

(1) Prices are nationwide retail averages; information derived by *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs* from data provided by Symphony Health Solutions. (2) Dose used for calculation is double the dose listed in first column. Price of that dose is not given here.