

Drug Safety: Taking Drugs as Directed

About half of all adults do not take their prescription drugs as directed.

If you skip doses, take less than the full dose, or stop too soon, the drug may not work properly. Taking too much of a drug can also harm you. Here are some common reasons why people do not take their drugs as directed:

- “ I felt better so I stopped taking it. ”
- “ I didn't understand how to take it. ”
- “ I didn't like the side effects. ”
- “ I couldn't afford the medicine. ”
- “ I didn't feel better. I thought it wasn't working so I stopped taking it. ”
- “ I cut the pill in half to save money. ”

Our advice:

Ask your doctor how the drug will help you.

Tell your doctor if you do not want to take it.

Ask your doctor or pharmacist how to take the new drug.

- How much should I take?
- When should I take it?
- What should I do if I forget to take a dose?
- How long should I take it, even if I feel better?
- When will the drug start working and how will I know if it is working?
- What are the possible side effects and what should I do if I have one?

Tell your doctor if cost is a problem.

Millions of people do not take their drugs as directed because they cannot afford them. Tell your doctor if you cannot afford a drug.

- Ask if there is a generic drug that costs less.
- Ask about prescription assistance programs (PAPs) and drug discount cards. Visit our free website, www.ConsumerReportsHealth.org/BestBuyDrugs.
- If you have Medicare, ask about the Extra Help program. Call 1-800-MEDICARE.

Your doctor prescribes a drug to help you cure or manage a health problem. Even if you feel better, do not stop taking the drug until your doctor says you can. If you are concerned about the cost, ask about a generic drug.



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Tell your doctor if you are concerned about side effects.

Many people are afraid of side effects from drugs. Ask your doctor which side effects are serious. Call your doctor if you are worried about or think you are having a side effect.

Keep the bottles or boxes your drugs come in.

- The original bottle or box tells you the name of the drug, how to take it, and what the possible side effects are.
- If you use a pill organizer, put pills in it directly from the bottle. Keep the rest in the bottle.

Take each drug exactly as directed.

- The bottle or box tells you how many times a day to take the drug and how much to take each time.
- The insert or the package tells you important information, too. For example, it tells you if you need to take the drug with or without food. It tells you common side effects. And it tells you danger signs to watch for.

Take every dose.

- If you skip a dose or take a smaller dose, your drug will not work as it should. Ask your doctor or pharmacist what to do if you miss a dose.
- If you are afraid to take the full dose, talk to your doctor or pharmacist.

Take the drug for as long as directed.

- Even if you feel better or your symptoms stop, you need to take a drug for as long as your doctor tells you to.
- If you stop, your condition can come back or get worse.
- Some drugs must be stopped slowly or they can cause problems.

Follow special directions.

- Some drugs should be taken with food. Other drugs should be taken alone.
- If it is hard to follow the special directions, ask your doctor or pharmacist to help you make a schedule for taking all your drugs safely.

Store drugs safely.

- Store drugs in a dry, cool place.
- Do not store them in the bathroom cabinet or near a stove or microwave.
- Do not refrigerate them unless the label says to.

Order refills before you run out.

- Call in a refill a week or more before you run out of a drug.
- Or, ask your pharmacy if it will refill your drugs at the same time each month and then call you when they are ready to be picked up.
- If you get drugs by mail, order a refill 2 weeks before you run out.

Throw out any drugs that have passed the expiration date.

The expiration date is on the bottle or box. It says “Discard after:” or “Exp. after:” After this date, the drug may not be safe or effective. Ask your pharmacist how to safely throw away your unused drugs.

Resources

Visit these websites:

- www.ConsumerReportsHealth.org/BestBuyDrugs
- www.medlineplus.gov—click on Drugs & Supplements