

Drug Safety: Side Effects

All drugs can have side effects.

For example, a drug that helps you sleep may also make your mouth dry. Most side effects are not dangerous. And many side effects go away quickly. There are things you can do to help avoid or manage side effects. To learn more, visit our free website, www.ConsumerReportsHealth.org/BestBuyDrugs.



Our advice:

Tell your doctor about any side effects you have had before.

Your doctor can help you avoid and manage side effects. It is very important to tell your doctor about any serious or unpleasant side effects, allergies, or bad reactions you have had with drugs in the past.

Ask about the side effects of the new drug.

Talk to your doctor and pharmacist when you get a new drug. Review the information that comes with the drug.

- Ask the doctor if you will feel different when you take the drug. For example, will you feel more sleepy than usual or have an upset stomach?
- Ask which side effects are most common.
- Ask which side effects are serious.

Ask your doctor how to manage common side effects.

Some common side effects, such as a dry mouth, are annoying but not dangerous. Ask if they are likely to go away.

Or ask about ways to manage them. For example, diuretics, or water pills, are for high blood pressure. They make you go to the bathroom more. Your doctor may suggest that you take the pill in the morning, so that you do not have to get up at night.

Don't hesitate to call your doctor about a side effect. Your doctor may be able to lower the dose of the drug or find a different drug that works better for you.

Drug Safety: Side Effects

Tell your doctor if a side effect is a problem for you or if it lasts more than a few days.

Your doctor may be able to prescribe another drug that will not cause the same side effects. Or your doctor may be able to tell you ways to manage or reduce side effects. Talk to your doctor before you stop taking a drug. Ask if there are other drugs for your condition, or ways to manage your side effects.

Ask about danger signs. And report any serious or on-going side effects right away.

Some side effects, like vomiting or trouble breathing, can be dangerous. Ask your doctor what the danger signs are. The information sheet that comes with each drug tells you which side effects are serious.

Ask what you should do if you have a serious side effect. Should you call the doctor right away? Should you go to the Emergency Room?

Read the information that comes with each drug.

Prescription drugs come with safety information for patients. This information tells you:

- How to take the drug.
- If you need to follow any special directions when you are taking the drug. For example, you may be told to avoid some other drugs, some foods, alcohol, or sun.
- Danger signs to watch for.
- Side effects.

If you need this information in your language or in large print, ask the pharmacist. The law says the pharmacy must give this to you.

Over-the-counter drugs also have side effects. Read the packaging and insert for information.

It is a good idea to review drug safety information every few months.

Resources

Visit these websites:

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

Before your doctor prescribes a new drug, tell her any side effects you have had to drugs. Ask about the possible side effects of the new drug. And ask about ways to avoid or reduce side effects.