

Be careful with . . .

Giving injections

Check your technique with your nurse or pharmacist. Dispose of the needle in the proper container to prevent injury to others. Your pharmacist or nurse will instruct you on safe disposal of needles.

Giving medicines through a feeding tube

Some medicines should not be put into a feeding tube. Ask your pharmacist for guidance.

More Caregiver Advice

When coming home from the hospital or nursing home . . .

This can be a confusing time. The patient may have left home with several medicines and come back with several new ones. Make sure everybody knows which ones to take and which ones not to take.

New Drugs, Old Drugs

Sometimes medicines come in different forms with different names, but contain the same active ingredient. To avoid confusion, write down the brand name and the generic name of all medicines.

Nutrition, Diet and Fluids

Pay attention to appetite, weight, and changes in eating habits. Notify the doctor if there are any concerns. Remember, good nutrition is essential for good health.

Caregivers should be familiar with all special diets, what to avoid and what to encourage. Unless otherwise instructed, make sure the patient gets plenty of fluids (6-8 glasses a day).

The ElderCare Patient Education Series includes:

Aging and Your Response to Medicines
 Alcohol: Friend or Foe?
 Caregiver's Guide to Using Medicines
 Consumer's Quick Reference to Using Medicines
 Eye Medicines: May Be More Than Meets the Eye
 Home Safety Issues: Poison Prevention for Older Adults
 How to Select Your Pharmacy & Pharmacist
 Medicines and Travel
 Over-the-Counter Medicines: Choosing the Right Nonprescription Drug
 Personal Medicine Record
 Questions You May Have About Generic Medicines
 Vitamins Are Not Enough: A Nutritional and Vitamin Guide for Older Adults



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The Caregiver's Guide to Using Medicines



THE PETER LAMY CENTER
 for Drug Therapy and Aging

If you care for an older family member or friend . . .

You may have problems if your family member is...

- seeing more than one doctor.
- taking several medicines.
- going to several pharmacies.

Caregivers need to know...

- all prescription medicines.
- all nonprescription medicines.
- all nutritional supplements.
- when and how to give each medicine.
- what results to expect from the medicine (*desired effects and side effects*) and when the medicine should take effect.
- what physical or mental changes should be monitored.
- when and how to monitor these changes.
- when to report these changes to the doctor.

Sometimes medicines can be the cause of undesirable changes!

Who can help me get this information?

- Doctors
- Nurses
- Pharmacists
- Other healthcare professionals



Do not be satisfied with vague directions such as:

“Four times a day”

- Does “four times a day” mean every six hours around the clock, or with meals and at bedtime?

“Take as directed”

- Can the medicine be taken with other medicines or with food?
- Should certain foods be avoided?

“Before meals”

- How long “before” a meal should the medicine be given?

“As needed”

- What symptoms should be present before giving a medicine “as needed”?
- How often can an “as needed” medicine be given?

“Unlimited refills for one year”

- The need for all medicines should be determined at least every 3-6 months.

Ask the pharmacist to put the specific directions on the label and to tell you how to follow those directions.

Unanswered questions

- Prepare for your visit to the doctor or other healthcare professional.
- Write your questions down in advance.
- Be sure that your questions are answered, and that you understand the answers to your questions.

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Giving chewable tablets

Because they may interfere with dentures or irritate the gums, older patients don't like to chew them. Have the patient suck on the tablet to dissolve it before swallowing; it should not be swallowed whole. Have the patient rinse his or her mouth after taking a chewable tablet.

Crushing tablets or opening capsules

Many pills cannot be crushed because they are designed to be long-acting. Others should not be crushed because the contents may be irritating to the stomach. If your patient has difficulty swallowing a tablet or capsule, ask the pharmacist what to do. There may be a liquid available.

Measuring liquid medicines

These are difficult to measure accurately. The dose may be critical. Ask the pharmacist for a measuring device.

Applying ointments or creams

Medicines applied to the skin will have an effect on your skin too. Use gauze to apply and wash hands afterward.

Applying patches

Know how often to apply the patch, where to apply it on the body, and remember to remove the old patch. If the skin becomes irritated or the patch does not stick, ask the pharmacist for advice. When throwing patches away, fold them in half, then discard in a place where children or pets cannot get them.