

# Medications

Individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) often take long term medications to help manage a health concern. There will also be times when a medicine is needed for a short-term illness or infection. There are many kinds of medications, they can be in the form of pills or liquids and sometimes they are injections. Many of the medications we take require a prescription from a doctor. These come from a pharmacy are filled based on what the doctor told the pharmacist.

Some medicines that help us feel better do not need a prescription and can be purchased over the counter. These can help with common complaints like a headache or a cold. There are also some pills that help to stay healthy like vitamins.

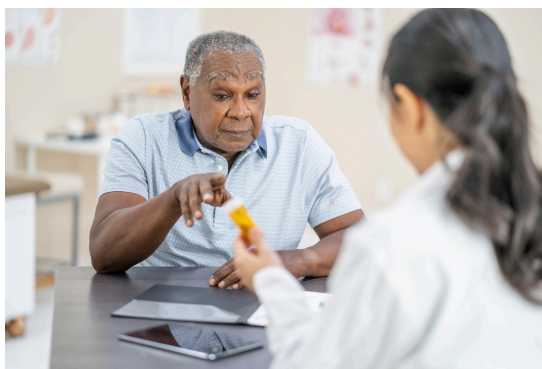


All these medications can help us if they are used correctly! It is important to keep track of what a person is taking. Some medicines do not work well with each other. The doctor needs to know everything that you are taking. Some medicines are meant to be taken with food and it is important to take medicine at the right time each day.

The doctor will work with you to get the best medicine for your health, you should ask questions to make sure you understand. The pharmacist can help with medicine questions also.

## Here are some questions to ask about before starting a medication:

- What is the medication for?
- What will it do?
- When should I start feeling better?
- What could the side effects be?
- What if I experience side effects?
- How long do I need to take it?
- Can I get better without medication?
- How much does it cost?
- Are there lower-cost medicines?



# Signs of Medication Problems

- Throwing up (vomiting)
- Getting a rash on your skin
- Feeling confused
- Sweating
- Feeling too sleepy
- Speaking too slow or fast
- Having pain



If you have any of these signs, call your doctor right away or call 911.

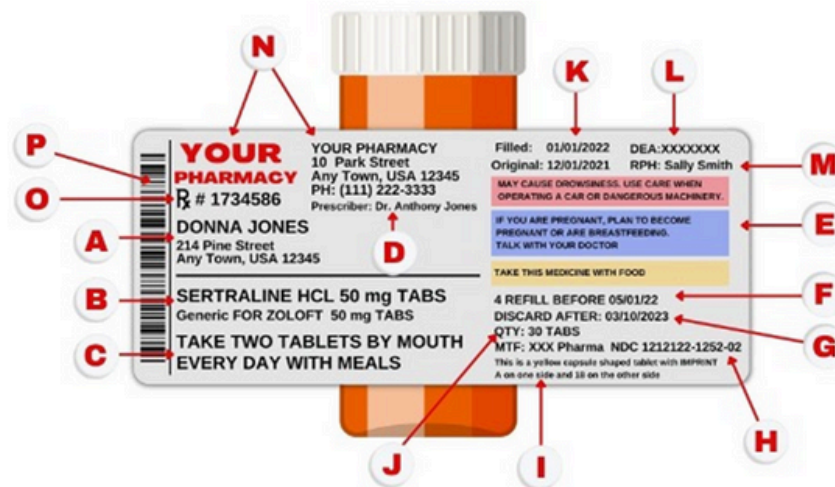
# How do you correctly and safely take your medications?

- Take the right amount of medication or dose
- Take the medication at the right time
- Do not share your medications with anyone
- Know the possible side effects
- Store your medication according to the instructions (In the cabinet, refrigerator, etc.)
- Use an alarm reminder
- Have a person help you remember
- Use a medication organizer to help organize your pills for the correct time and day



# Understanding My Prescription Label

Prescriptions for medicine include important information such as the name of the medicine, the dosage, and directions for how it should be taken. This information is printed on the pharmacy label that is placed on the prescription bottle given to you by the pharmacy. It is important to read the information found on the pharmacy label to make sure the medicine is for you and that it is the medicine you expect. Pharmacy labels may look slightly different at each pharmacy (e.g., CVS, Walgreens). Each letter in the image below points to information commonly found on a pharmacy label. Look for the corresponding letter listed below the image to learn more about the information provided on the pharmacy label.



# Understanding Your Prescription Label (Continued)

**A.** Your name and address. Your name and address should be listed here. If the medicine is for a family member or friend, their name and address should be listed. It is important to make sure this information is correct before leaving the pharmacy.

**B.** Name of the medicine. The generic and/or brand name of the medicine, its strength, and formulation (e.g., tablets, capsules) may be listed on the same line.

**C.** Directions. The prescriber will provide information about how the medicine should be taken. These instructions will be put on the label so you know how much to take (e.g., two tablets), how often, and sometimes what time of the day to take it. Medicines that come in different formulations such as liquids, creams, or injections, will have specific instructions on how they should be used. Be sure to read the directions on the pharmacy label before leaving the pharmacy and ask your pharmacist to review them with you to make sure you understand how to take the medicine.

**D.** Name of the prescriber. The person (e.g., doctor, nurse practitioner, physician's assistant) who prescribed the medicine.

**E.** Warnings or special instructions. Warnings and special instructions are placed on the container. Sometimes they are applied as stickers and sometimes they are printed on the label. This information often includes common side effects of the medicine and special instructions such as take with food or avoid the sun.

**F.** Refills. Sometimes the prescriber will order refills for the medicine. The number of times the medicine can be refilled will be included on the label. Some medicines, such as antibiotics, do not usually include refills.

**G.** Discard date. This is the date the medicine will expire. If all of the medicine is not used by this date, it should be discarded. Learn how to properly discard unused medicine [here](#).

**H.** Manufacturer information and NDC. The name of the drug company that made the medicine is included on the container. The NDC number, or National Drug Code, is a unique code the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) assigns to each drug so it can be identified if the medicine is recalled.

**I.** Description of the tablet or capsule. Most pharmacy labels will provide a description of what the medicine looks like (e.g., color, shape). For tablets and capsules, the description may also include the letters or numbers imprinted on them.

**J.** The quantity. The number of tablets or capsules in the container.

**K.** Date. The date the original prescription was filled. If you had the prescription refilled, the date that was refilled will be listed too.

**L.** DEA number. The US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) assigns each pharmacy with a unique DEA number. A DEA number is required by pharmacies to dispense controlled substances like opioids. This number may appear on the label even if the medicine is not a controlled substance.

**M.** Name of the pharmacist. The name of the pharmacist that filled your prescription may be listed on the label.

**N.** Name, location, and telephone number of your pharmacy. This is where your prescription was filled. If you have any questions about your prescription once you are home, use this information to contact your pharmacist.

**O.** Your prescription number. Every prescription is given a unique number. This number can be used to request a refill.

**P.** Barcode. The prescription label will have a barcode. Pharmacists and pharmacy technicians use barcoding technology to verify they have the correct medicine and dosage for a specific patient.

This website has good information about medicines:

<https://www.consumermedsafety.org/safety-tips/learn-to-read-a-prescription-label>

## Acknowledgement

The Iowa Taking Charge of My Health (TCMH) curriculum, including power points, worksheets and fact sheets is inspired by Oregon's University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD) Taking Charge of my Healthcare Toolkit which can be found at <https://www.ohsu.edu/oregon-office-on-disability-and-health/taking-charge-my-health-care>.

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The information provided is for general use and not medical advice or intended to address any individual situation.