

Making the most of your medicines

Most of us will take medicines at some point in our lives. For some of us this may be for a short period (days, months or a few years), for others medicines may be needed for the rest of our lives.

Medicines can be used to stop us getting ill, help us stay healthy, control our conditions or cure an illness. But using them sometimes isn't easy. You need to:

- ✓ take them at the right times and in the right way
- ✓ look out for side effects or for signs that you aren't getting any better (or getting worse)
- ✓ if you need medicines regularly make sure you always have enough of your medicines.

This can take time and commitment especially if you are taking many different medicines.

Understanding what your medicines are for, how they work, when and how to take them and why they should be taken as prescribed can help to make sure you get the best results from medicines.

Here are some things that you can do to make the most of your medicines.

What can you do?

- ✓ When you or someone you care for is prescribed a medicine here are some questions that you might want to ask your doctor, pharmacist, nurse or other health professional.

It may help to print these questions and take them with you next time you see your health professional, you can [find them here](#).

Questions to ask about your medicines

- ✓ What am I taking this medicine for?
- ✓ Does this new prescription mean I should stop taking any other medicines?
- ✓ How and when should I take my medicine?
- ✓ How long should I take my medicine for?
- ✓ When will it start working? How can I tell if it's working?
- ✓ Are there any foods, drinks, or other medicines to avoid while I'm taking this medicine?
- ✓ What are the potential side-effects? What should I do if I think I have a side-effect?
- ✓ What should I do if I miss a dose?
- ✓ How do I get more of this medicine if it runs out?
- ✓ Who should I talk to if I want any further help when taking this medicine?

- ✓ If you have any questions speak to your health professional. Especially if:
 - you are thinking about stopping a medicine, or are not taking a medicine you have been prescribed
 - for any reason you are finding it difficult to take a medicine as it was prescribed
 - you are worried or concerned about side effects that you may be experiencing

- ✓ It may also help to find out more about the condition that you have and if there is anything that you can do to help stay well.

"I have an alarm on my phone which reminds me to take my medicines and quite often I just ignore it, the text message which comes through a little later is the one I find more helpful because it sits on my phone and every time I look at my phone I remember that I haven't taken my meds."*

Patient with HIV

*see www.tht.org.uk/myhiv/Services

What can you expect?

Your doctor, pharmacist, nurse or other health professional should work in partnership with you and:

- ✓ Help you to understand your medicines (what they do, how to use them) so that you can make decisions about your treatment. This may mean choosing a different medicine or treatment if it suits you better.
- ✓ Discuss with you your experiences of taking or not taking medicines, your views about what medicines mean to you and how medicines affect your daily life.
- ✓ Look for ways for you to get, take or use your medicines that fit in with your daily life.
- ✓ If you have any problems with your medicines help you to find solutions that you find acceptable.
- ✓ Jointly agree with you the desired outcomes from treatment, when a review of your condition will take place and if any monitoring is needed before and during treatment.

"I have a tremor caused by one of my medicines. To help control this I was prescribed another medicine three times a day. I found it was very difficult to take the dose in the middle of the day. The combination of my work schedule and finding a suitable place to take the tablet meant that I often missed the dose. I struggled with this for years until finally I was prescribed the tablet as a slow release version that I now take once in the morning."

Patient with bipolar disorder

Where can you go to find more support or information?

- [NHS Choices](#) has patient information about a range of illnesses and conditions as well as help for people wanting to stay healthy
- Local community pharmacists are always available on your high street. Pharmacists provide free expert advice about medicines and information about a wide variety of health issues.
- Patient Groups may have help-lines, resources and local groups that can support you.
- If you have any queries about medicines and are unable to talk directly to a healthcare professional, you can dial the NHS 111 number for advice.
- Every medicine should come with an information leaflet. It often contains a lot of information, but may answer specific questions that you have. If you have a question about a specific medicine the pharmaceutical company may have an information service that you can contact.
- [The Royal Pharmaceutical Society](#) has a website for members of the public with resources that can help you make the most of your medicines
- [The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence](#) (NICE) has information to enable and support you to make decisions about your prescribed medicines.
- [The NHS Constitution](#) describes your rights and your responsibilities when using the National Health Service.