



**MUST**  
Medication Use Safety Training  
FOR SENIORS

BeMedWise.org



**Medication Use Safety Training for Seniors™**

**A National Education Campaign  
for Older Adults and Caregivers**

*developed by the*

BeMedWise Program at NeedyMeds, formerly known as the  
National Council on Patient Information and Education (NCPPIE)

*with support from the*

University of Maryland School of Pharmacy





The BeMedWise Program at NeedyMeds, formerly known as the **National Council on Patient Information and Education (NCPIE)** is a non-profit coalition of over 100 diverse organizations. BeMedWise's mission is to stimulate and improve communication of information on the appropriate use of medicines to consumers and healthcare professionals. BeMedWise develops programs, provides educational resources, and offers services to advance the common mission of its members.

**The Medication Use Safety Training (MUST) for Seniors™** program is designed as an interactive, national initiative to promote safe and appropriate medicine use by enabling older adults to avoid medication misuse, recognize and manage common side effects, and improve medicine use knowledge, attitudes, and skills to avoid medication errors.

**MUST for Seniors™** can be offered to community-based, ambulatory older adults. Older individuals and family caregivers are also encouraged to visit [Toolkits for older adults](#) to view the online PowerPoint presentation, and other program messages and materials.



It's important to take the time to learn all you can about the medicines you use. This booklet provides useful information and helpful tips to help ensure you and your family know how to use medicines safely. This will help you get the best results and avoid problems.

## Facts to Know

- **A product is a medicine or drug if it:**
  - ✓ Changes the way your body works OR
  - ✓ Treats or prevents a disease
- **Types of medicines include:**
  - ✓ Prescription medicines, such as blood pressure medicines, antibiotics, or birth control pills
  - ✓ Over-the-Counter (OTC) drugs are medicines you can buy without a prescription, including aspirin, antacids, laxatives, and cough medicine.
- **When used correctly, medicines can lead to:**
  - ✓ Better health
  - ✓ Improved quality of life
  - ✓ Longer life, especially for people with cancer, heart disease and other life-threatening conditions
- **Medicines can make us better and prevent illnesses. Medicines also have risks. It's important to weigh the benefits and risks for each medicine.**



## Take Note!

### Generic vs. Brand

A generic drug (called by its chemical name) has the same active ingredients as the brand name. The generic works the same way in the body and is a copy of the brand name drug in dosage, safety, strength, how it is taken, quality, performance and intended use.





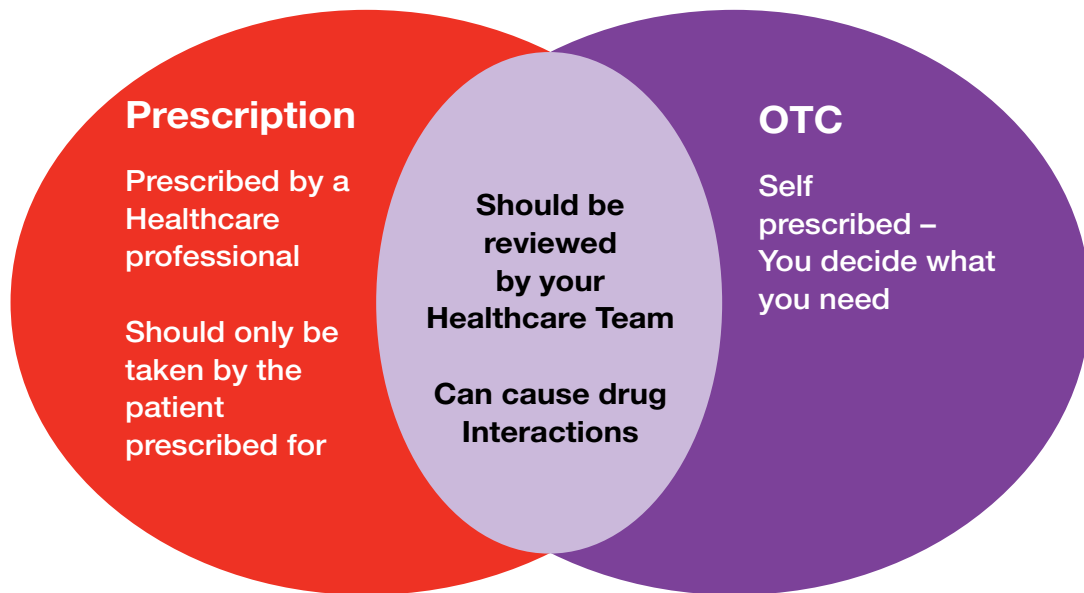
## Take Note!

### Dietary supplements and herbal remedies **do not have to follow**

the same strict rules that prescription drugs have to follow by law. That means these products *do not* have to:

- Be proven safe; manufacturers are *not* required to record, investigate or report any information they find about related injuries or sickness
- Work
- Be clean, pure or actually contain what the label claims

## Prescription and Nonprescription or Over-the-Counter (OTC) Medicines



## What's the Difference?

### Medicine Use: Risks and Problems

Medicines can cause problems, even if used correctly.

**Allergic reactions** occur when your body's defense system reacts in a bad way to a medicine. **These might include:**

- Hives, itching or a rash
- Narrowing of the throat, difficulty breathing, shortness of breath

**Side effects** are undesired effects of a medicine that can occur even though the medicine is being taken correctly at the recommended dose. **These might include:**

- Headache, dizziness, or an upset stomach, which are common side effects
- Liver failure, which is a very rare side effect

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## Medicine use problems can:

- Prevent you from getting well as fast as you would like to
- Make you sicker
- Lower your quality of life

This is why it's so important to take steps to understand and properly use your medicines.



## Medicine Use: Risks and Problems, *continued*

### Potential medicine use problems

If you've had problems with your medicine(s), you're not alone. In fact, one out of every three people experience at least one medicine-related problem.

#### These might include:

- **Over use** – taking more than prescribed or recommended by the healthcare provider or label. This can happen by accident – maybe you forgot you took your blood pressure medicine this morning, so you take it again.
- **Under use** – taking less than prescribed or recommended, or by missing or skipping doses.
- **Not following instructions** or taking medicines that are not prescribed for you.
- **Drug interactions** occur when a drug interacts with another drug, food, or alcohol and changes the way the drug acts in the body.

#### Some examples are:

- ✓ Alcohol consumed with pain medicines (e.g., tramadol/ Ultram,<sup>®</sup> Ultracet<sup>®</sup>)
- ✓ Selective Serotonin Re-uptake Inhibitor (SSRI) Antidepressants (e.g., sertraline/ Zoloft<sup>®</sup>) taken with St. Johns Wort
- ✓ Grapefruit Juice taken with certain medicine(s) (e.g., amlodipine/Norvasc<sup>®</sup> and simvastatin/Zocor<sup>®</sup>)

## Helpful Tips to Avoid Problems

- **Learn about your health conditions and medicines.** Talk with your healthcare providers, including your pharmacist.
- **Make a medication list that includes:**
  - ✓ Names of all medications you use, including any OTCs, dietary supplements and herbal remedies
  - ✓ Who prescribed each medication
  - ✓ What each medication is used for
  - ✓ How often and at what dose (amount) you take each
  - ✓ Whether refills are needed

Be sure to update the list when you start taking something new or if a medicine dose is changed by your healthcare provider.

Make a copy of your medicine list for your records. Make extra copies to share with your loved ones and healthcare providers.

Your primary care provider should review all of your medications at least annually to make sure you are only taking those you need. Remind him or her of any allergies or problems you've had with certain medicines. Don't stop taking prescribed medicine without checking with him/her first.

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## Ask Questions!

Don't be **afraid to ask** your healthcare provider questions or review information that is not clear to you. Remember, ***you are the best judge*** of your body, and are in the “driver’s seat” for your health.



## Helpful Tips to Avoid Problems, *continued*

- **Always read the *Drug Facts* label** (found on the back or side of OTC packages), package inserts or Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) leaflets (often stapled to your prescription medicine bag). These can provide useful information to help you get the best results and avoid problems.

### These tell you:

- ✓ What your medicine is used for
- ✓ How to take your medicine correctly (how often you should take it and at what amount or dosage)
- ✓ Possible side effects or allergic reactions to watch out for
- ✓ Warnings
- ✓ Storage instructions

- **Try to use one pharmacy** so that your prescription records are all in one place. This helps your pharmacist monitor which medications you take and let you know about potential drug interactions.
- **Double check your prescriptions** at the pharmacy counter (be sure that your name and the drug name are correct).
- **Never take someone else's medicine.**
- **Safely store medicines away from children.** Check expiration dates. Keep all medications in the bottle, box or tube that they came in. For tips on safe storage and how to safely throw away unused medications, visit the [Safe medicine storage & disposal](http://www.bemedwise.org) page on [www.bemedwise.org](http://www.bemedwise.org) and download the infographic: [Do's and Don'ts of Medicine Disposal](#).
- **Contact your healthcare provider** if you have any problems with your medicine.

| Drug Facts  |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Active ingredient</b> (in each tablet)<br>Chlorpheniramine maleate, 1 mg   | <b>Purpose</b><br>Antihistamine  |
| <b>Uses</b> temporarily relieves these symptoms due to hay fever or other upper respiratory allergens:<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ sneezing</li> <li>■ runny nose</li> <li>■ itchy, watty eyes</li> <li>■ itchy throat</li> </ul>   |  |
| <b>Warnings</b><br><b>Ask a doctor before use if you have:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ glaucoma</li> <li>■ a breathing problem such as emphysema or chronic bronchitis</li> <li>■ trouble urinating due to an enlarged prostate gland</li> </ul>   |  |
| <b>Ask a doctor or pharmacist before use if you are taking tranquilizers or sedatives</b>   |  |
| <b>When using this product:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ You may get drowsy</li> <li>■ avoid alcohol drinks</li> <li>■ avoid, medicines, and tranquilizers may increase drowsiness</li> <li>■ be careful when driving a motor vehicle or operating machinery</li> <li>■ excitability may occur, especially in children</li> </ul> |  |
| If pregnant or breast-feeding, ask a health professional before use.<br>Keep out of reach of children. In case of overdose, get medical help or contact a Poison Control Center right away.   |  |
| <b>Directions</b>   |  |
| adults and children 12 years and over   | take 2 tablets every 4 to 6 hours;<br>not more than 12 tablets in 24 hours |
| children 6 years to under 12 years  | take 1 tablet every 4 to 6 hours;<br>not more than 6 tablets in 24 hours   |
| children under 6 years  | ask a doctor   |
| <b>Other information</b> store at 20°-25° C (68°-77° F) ■ protect from excessive moisture   |  |
| <b>Inactive ingredients</b> D&C yellow no. 10, lactose, magnesium stearate, microcrystalline cellulose, pregelatinized starch   |  |





## Questions to Ask Your Healthcare Team

### You may want to ask:

1. What am I taking this medicine for?
2. Is it a brand or generic drug?
3. Does this new prescription mean I should stop taking any other medicines I'm taking now?
4. How it should be taken.
  - ✓ How much?
  - ✓ How often and what time of day (For example, does four times a day mean during the daytime or within a 24 hour period)?
  - ✓ With or without food?
  - ✓ When should I stop taking the medicine?
  - ✓ Will I need a refill?
5. What side effects can I expect? What should I do if I have a problem?
6. How do I tell if the medication is working?
7. Are there foods, drinks (including alcoholic beverages), other medicines, or activities to avoid while I'm taking this medicine?
8. What if I miss a dose?
9. Are there any tests I need to take while I'm on this medicine?
10. Where and how should it be stored?



## Ask Questions!

Find out as much as you can about the medications, including dietary supplements and OTCs, you take. By **taking the time to ask questions now**, you may be **preventing problems later**.

**Take notes** and remember that your **pharmacist can help answer** a lot of these questions, too.

When visiting any health-care provider – Take your Medicine List, which contains information on:

- All prescription medicine, including eye drops, topicals, samples
- Nonprescription (OTC) medicines, herbals, vaccines
- What is the medicine used for
- How should you take them

### Make copies of your list

- Give one to your doctor, one to your pharmacist, and one to a loved one.
- Carry one with you and keep a copy at home.
- Make sure to keep it updated!



## Healthcare Provider Contact Sheet

Use this form to keep track of your healthcare team.

Doctor \_\_\_\_\_ Phone number \_\_\_\_\_

Nurse \_\_\_\_\_ Phone number \_\_\_\_\_

Pharmacist \_\_\_\_\_ Phone number \_\_\_\_\_

24-hour Pharmacy \_\_\_\_\_ Phone number \_\_\_\_\_

### Medicine List *(example)*

| Prescription Name & Strength | What is it for? | How much to take and when? | Do not take with | Prescriber |
|------------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|------------------|------------|
|------------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|------------------|------------|

|                                  |                                  |                                   |   |  |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|--|
| <b>Tetracycline<br/>(250 mg)</b> | <b>Respiratory<br/>Infection</b> | <b>1 tablet<br/>4 times a day</b> | <b>Antacids<br/>or dairy<br/>products</b> |  |
|                                  |                                  |                                   |   |  |
|                                  |                                  |                                   |   |  |

| OTCs, Vitamins, Herbals and Dietary Supplements | Dosage | Frequency |
|---|--------|-----------|
|   |        |           |
|   |        |           |
|   |        |           |



## Resources

### For more information on using medicine safely:

BeMedWise Program at NeedyMeds (Formerly known as the National Council on Patient Information and Education, NCPIE) – [www.bemedwise.org](http://www.bemedwise.org)  
The Peter Lamy Center For Drug Therapy and Aging – [www.pharmacy.umaryland.edu/lamy](http://www.pharmacy.umaryland.edu/lamy)

AARP – <https://www.aarp.org/>  
Drugs & Supplements – <https://www.aarp.org/health/drugs-supplements/>

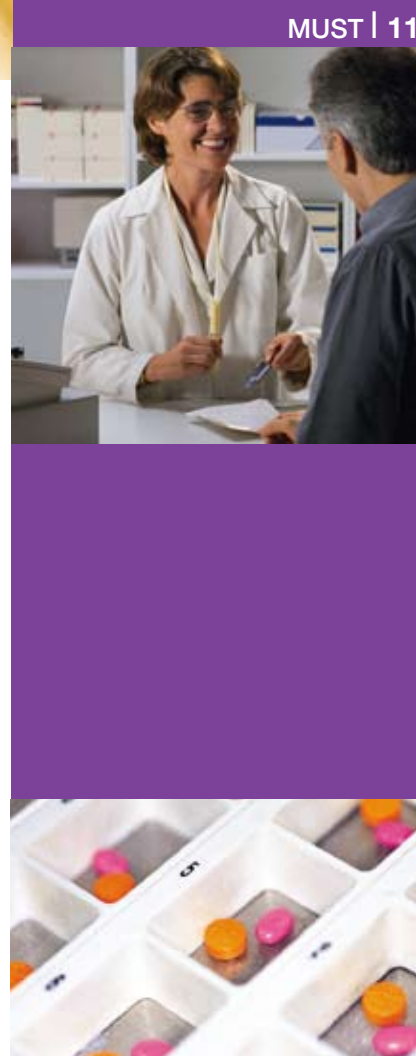
Institute for Safe Medication Practices – [www.ismp.org](http://www.ismp.org)

U.S. Food and Drug Administration – [www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov)  
How to Buy Medicines Safely From an Online Pharmacy – <https://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm048396.htm>

### Dietary Supplements

National Institutes of Health Office for Dietary Supplements – [www.ods.od.nih.gov](http://www.ods.od.nih.gov)

U.S. Food and Drug Administration – <https://www.fda.gov/Food/DietarySupplements/default.htm>





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## Remember the 3 R's for Safe Medication Use

1. All medicines, prescription and nonprescription, have **RISKS** as well as benefits. You need to weigh these risks and benefits carefully for every medicine you take.
2. **RESPECT** the power of your medicine and the value of medicines properly used.
3. Take **RESPONSIBILITY** for learning about how to take your medication safely.

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<https://www.pharmacy.umaryland.edu/centers/lamy/>

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