Get the Most from Your Medicines
Managing Side Effects

This leaflet contains practical tips that will help you get the most benefit from your medicines.
Learning How to Manage Side Effects

Today’s prescription medicines can save lives, help prevent disease, and keep people out of the hospital. But they can also cause unwanted side effects.

Some side effects are common. Others are very rare. Side effects can occur even though the medicine is being taken correctly at the normal dose.

Have you ever stopped taking a medicine because it caused a side effect? Unfortunately, many people who develop a minor side effect stop taking their medicine without first checking with their healthcare professional (doctor, pharmacist, physician assistant, nurse, or dentist). The result is that the medicine never gets the chance to work, and your medical condition could get worse.

Often, there are simple steps that can be taken to manage minor side effects. That is why, when starting a medicine, it is important to know:

- what the possible side effects might be.
- what you can do to manage minor side effects.
- which symptoms should prompt you to get medical advice.

The decisions you make about how to manage side effects can play a big role in how successful your treatment will be.

Most Side Effects Are Mild...

Most side effects are mild enough that you can manage them successfully and still keep taking your medicine. Depending on the medicine, your healthcare professional may be able to suggest simple steps you can take to manage mild side effects such as upset stomach, diarrhea, or constipation.

Sometimes your doctor may need to change the dose of your medicine or recommend other treatments to help manage the side effect. Other times, your doctor may prescribe a different medicine that is less likely to cause the side effect.

...But Some Can Be Serious

Some side effects can be serious. These are often called "adverse drug reactions." They may require admission to a hospital or even be life-threatening.

Ask your doctor or pharmacist about any serious side effects that have been reported for your medicine. For example, a sore throat, fever, and mouth sores could be the early warning signs of a life-threatening blood problem with some medicines. However, you might just think you were coming down with the flu. Another example is easy bruising or nosebleeds if you are taking a medicine that is used to thin the blood. These may be signs that the dose of your blood thinning medicine needs to be changed.

If you recognize the warning symptoms early, you can get treatment before they become more serious. When you know how to recognize the early warning signs of a serious side effect, your doctor can take immediate steps to help keep the problem from getting worse.
About the National Council on Patient Information and Education

NCPIE is a nonprofit coalition representing healthcare professionals, consumers and patients, the pharmaceutical industry, voluntary health agencies, and federal and state governments. NCPIE is committed to stimulating and improving communication of information on appropriate use of medicines to consumers and healthcare professionals.

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About Consumer Health Information Corporation

This pamphlet was written and produced by Consumer Health Information Corporation, a member of the Board of Directors of NCPIE. The company specializes in patient education and develops programs to help consumers learn how to manage their health and medicines safely.

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This pamphlet contains general information and is not intended to take the place of any advice from your healthcare professionals. They know your specific medical condition and medicines.

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