

Prescription Safety

By Suze Hargraves

How many prescription and non-prescription drugs and supplements do you take every day? Forbes reports that “In 2008, total sales for prescription drugs reached \$291.5 billion, a 1.4% increase from the previous year.” That statistic translates to a lot of people taking a lot of medications. The more you take, the more room there is for potentially lethal mistakes. The good news is that, no matter how many pills you take, you can take simple steps to manage your medications safely and effectively.

Here are ten helpful tips to help you manage your medications and avoid mistakes.

1. Keep a list of all your medications, including daily supplements, aspirin or other over-the-counter product you take on a daily basis. Record the name, how much you take, when you take it and who prescribed the medication. Keep copies in your wallet, home medicine cabinet and give one to another member of the family who is most likely to be around in an emergency.
2. When your healthcare provider gives you a new prescription write down in your own handwriting how you are supposed to take it. Make sure you understand.
3. Check the medication at the pharmacy before you leave. Does the label have your name on it? Is the name of the medication right? Is the dosage right? Are there any warning labels on the container? Does the pill look the same? Check before you leave the pharmacy and again, ask questions if you are uncertain about any aspect of the medication.
4. Use pill boxes with days labeled on them to help avoid accidental overdoses.
5. Keep medications in the containers they came in (until you put your pill box together for the week if you are using one).
6. Follow the instructions for each medication. Don't stop taking a medication just because you “feel better”. Some medications require that you finish a prescribed amount of medicine (i.e. antibiotics) otherwise your symptoms will return. Check with your healthcare provider.
7. When taking liquid medications use the measuring device that came with it.
8. Be aware of the potential side effects of all medications and report any that you experience to your provider.
9. Don't abuse medication. Don't share it with others or take someone else's.
10. Be sure to let your provider know about all the over-the-counter supplements or other types of medications that you use on a regular basis. Some combinations of prescription and non-prescription drugs and supplements can render your medicine ineffective. Worse, some combinations can be lethal.

For more information on managing your medications go to www.drugs.com. The more you understand about the medications you take, the less likely you are to make mistakes or simply bad decisions about how you take them.

Be smart about your medications. Get organized and get educated.

Suze Hargraves is a staff member and writer for White Mountain Community Health Center, a non-profit health care provider serving the Mount Washington Valley. Call (603) 447-8900, Ext. 1, for an appointment or information.