

# Medications

What You Need To Know



## Permafold® Topics

1. Polypharmacy
2. Things to Tell Your Doctor
3. Questions to Ask
4. Dos and Don'ts for Safe Use
5. Prescription (Rx) Terms
6. Medication Match-Up
7. Over-the-Counter (OTC) Medicines
8. Your Home Pharmacy
9. Overhaul Your "Medicine Cabinet"
10. Resources



Reviewed and Approved by the Senior Medical Advisory Board



This Permafold® is not meant to take the place of expert medical care or treatment. Follow your doctor's or health care provider's advice.

## 1. Polypharmacy

Polypharmacy is when you are prescribed many medications which can become burdensome for you and increase the risk for drug interactions and side effects. These risks increase with age.



Additionally there is a high potential for interactions with certain foods, vitamins, and over the counter medications.

### Medications

All medications have side effects that differ from drug to drug. It is important to discuss potential side effects with your Doctor when starting a new medication.

### Side Effects

Side effects to talk to your Doctor about include:

- Unsteadiness
- Drowsiness
- Dizziness
- Falls
- Confusion
- Depression
- Nervousness
- Incontinence
- Fatigue
- Insomnia
- Hallucinations

You may also contact a pharmacist at Medco with questions about your medications. Call Medco at 1-866-662-0274.

## 2. Things to Tell Your Doctor

Before medicine is prescribed for you, let your doctor know the names and doses of all of the medicines and dietary supplements you take.

- Bring all of your prescribed and over-the-counter (OTC) medicines, vitamins, and herbs, in their original containers, with you to office visits.
- Ask your health insurance plan for a printout of the prescribed medicines you take.
- Make an easy-to-use “pill card” at the Web site: [www.ahrq.gov/qual/pillcard/pillcard.htm](http://www.ahrq.gov/qual/pillcard/pillcard.htm).
- If it is hard for you to swallow pills
- If cost is a factor. There may be a generic or lower-cost medicine.
- If you use alcohol, tobacco, or “street” drugs
- If your health plan lets you order 3 months worth of prescriptions by mail. Your doctor will have to write the prescription for a 3-month supply.
- If another health provider is treating you for any problem, such as high blood pressure
- If you are or could be pregnant or if you are breast-feeding

**Let your doctor know if you have medicine allergies or have had bad side effects from a medicine.**

**Be prepared to discuss other concerns, too.**



## 3. Questions to Ask

When prescribed medicines, get answers to the below questions.

*Note: Write down the answers you get. Also, ask about any terms or directions you do not understand.*

- What is the name of the medicine? What will it do? When should it be taken?
- How long should it be taken?
  - Do I need to get one or more refills?
  - Will I need more or less of this medicine as time goes on?
  - Will I need this medicine the rest of my life?
  - Is there a way to measure if what I take is enough or too much? Are any tests needed to show if the medicine is helping?
  - How often should we review my use of this medicine?
- Are there side effects? What do I do about side effects, if I have any? Which side effects should I let you know about?
- Should I take it with a lot of fluids? If so, how many ounces of fluid per day?
- Should I take it with food or on an empty stomach?
- Is there anything I should avoid while taking it (e.g., alcohol, grapefruit juice, sunlight, etc.)?
- Is there a generic form?
- How should I store the medicine? Is the medicine less potent once the container is opened?
- Will it interact or interfere with other medicines I am taking?
- Should I stop taking it if I feel better?
- What should I do if I miss a dose? Should I take it as soon as I remember or should I wait until the next scheduled dose? If I miss a dose (or more), how will this affect other medicines I take? Do I need to change how I take any of them?
- Do you have any written information on the medicine? (You can ask your pharmacist for this, too.)

## 4. Dos and Don'ts for Safe Use



### Dos

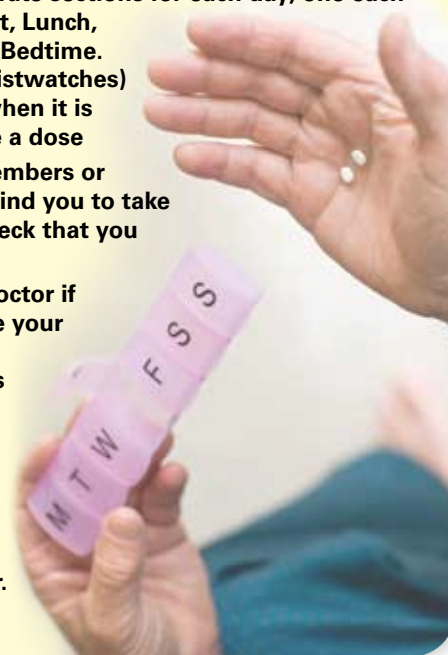
- Use the same pharmacy for all prescribed medicines. Your pharmacist can check for harmful interactions.
- Check with your doctor or pharmacist before taking OTC medicines, herbal products, and supplements.
- When you get your medicine, read the label and look at the medicine. If you have any concerns, tell your pharmacist.
- Keep medicines in their original containers and out of the reach of children.
- Throw away all expired medicines. Crush pills. Dissolve them in water. Mix this with used coffee grounds or kitty litter and put it in the trash in a sealable bag.
- Try to reduce the need for medicines, such as sleeping pills and laxatives. Check with your doctor on ways, other than medicines, to help treat your problems.

### Don'ts

- Don't stop taking medicines your doctor has prescribed, even if you feel better. Check with your doctor first.
- Don't drink alcohol while on a medicine if you don't know its effect. Some medicines, such as sedatives, can be deadly when used with alcohol. Read medicine labels for warnings.
- Never take someone else's prescribed medicine. Don't give your prescribed medicine to others.
- Don't take medicine in the dark. Make sure the light is on so you can read the label. Wear your glasses or contact lenses, if you need to.
- Don't buy an OTC medicine if the package is damaged or has been tampered with.

### Tips to Make Sure You Take Your Medicine(s)

- **Follow your treatment plan.**
- **Use products called compliance aids:**
  - **Check-off calendars**
  - **Containers with sections for daily doses. Some have 4 separate sections for each day; one each for Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner, and Bedtime.**
  - **Caps (or wristwatches) that beep when it is time to take a dose**
- **Ask family members or friends to remind you to take a dose and check that you took it.**
- **Talk to your doctor if you don't take your medicines as prescribed. It's okay to feel guilty or embarrassed. But don't let this stop you from talking to your doctor.**



## 5. Prescription (Rx) Terms

Term	What It Means
ad lib.	As needed
a.c.	Before meals
b.i.d.	Twice a day
caps	Capsule
gtt.	Drops
h.s.	At bedtime
p.o.	By mouth
p.c.	After meals
p.r.n.	As needed
q.4.h.	Every 4 hours
q.i.d.	Four times a day
q.d.	Daily
q.o.d.	Every other day
t.i.d.	Three times a day
Ut dict., UD	As directed

## 6. Medication Match-Up

### Medicine-Related Terms

Term	What It Means
Antiseptic	Destroys harmful germs
Buffered	An antacid has been added to protect the stomach lining
Elixir	A liquid form of a medicine. It is usually pleasant tasting.
Generic	The name of a medicine able to be used by each drug manufacturer. It is often used to mean a less costly equivalent of a brand name medicine.

### Types of Medicines

Type	Use
Acid Reducers or Controllers	Prevent and relieve heartburn
Amphetamines	Stimulate the central nervous system
Analgesics	Relieve pain
Antacids	Relieve heartburn and indigestion. Neutralize stomach acid
Antibiotics	Treat bacterial infections
Antiemetics	Treat nausea and vomiting
Antihistamines	Treat cold symptoms and allergic reactions
Barbiturates	Depress the central nervous system. (Can be addictive.)
Decongestants	Reduce swollen mucous membranes in the nose and sinuses
Diuretics	"Water pills." Help the body get rid of excess fluid and lower blood pressure.
Laxatives	Treat constipation
Muscle Relaxants	Relieve muscle spasms
Narcotics	Strong painkillers. Also promote sleep. (Can be addictive.)
Sedatives	Calming agents. (Can be addictive.)

## 7. Over-the-Counter (OTC) Medicines

Over-the-counter (OTC) medicines are ones that you can get without a prescription. In general, they are less potent than prescribed ones.

### Use OTC Medicines Wisely

- Ask your doctor what OTC products you should avoid and which ones are safe for you to use. These include herbal products and supplements. Find out what your doctor prefers you take for pain and fever. Ask your pharmacist if an OTC medicine is safe for you to take with your prescribed medicines.
- Do not exceed the dose on a label or take OTC medicines on a regular basis unless your doctor tells you to.
- If you have an allergy to a medicine, check for it in the list of ingredients on all medicines.
- Read information and warnings on the label to help you decide whether or not the product is safe for you to take. Check with your doctor or pharmacist, too. For information on reading OTC medicine labels, access [www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov). Search for “Over-the-Counter Medicine Label.”
- Don’t take an OTC medicine if you are pregnant or nursing a baby unless your doctor says it is okay.
- Be sure to store medicines in a convenient dry place, out of children’s reach.
- Don’t ever tell children that medicine is candy.
- Before you take an OTC medicine, check the expiration date. Replace items as needed.



## 8. Your Home Pharmacy

### Basic Over-the-Counter (OTC) Medications That Can Help with Self-Care\*

**Antacids** – (e.g., Tums<sup>®</sup>, Rolaids<sup>®</sup>, Mylanta<sup>®</sup>) – For stomach upset, heartburn. Don’t use for more than 2 weeks without your doctor’s advice. Don’t use high-sodium ones if on a low-salt diet. Don’t use if you have chronic kidney failure.

**Antidiarrheal medicine\*\*** – (e.g., Kaopectate<sup>®</sup>, Imodium A-D<sup>®</sup>, Pepto-Bismol<sup>®</sup>) – For diarrhea. Don’t give Pepto-Bismol to anyone under 19 years of age. It contains salicylates, which have been linked to Reye’s Syndrome. Pepto-Bismol can cause black stools.

**Antihistamines\*\*** – (e.g., Benadryl<sup>®</sup>) – Relieve allergy symptoms (runny nose and itching). May cause drowsiness, agitation, dry mouth, and/or problems with urinating. Don’t use with alcohol, when you operate machines, or when you drive. Don’t use if you have glaucoma, an enlarged prostate, or problems urinating.

**Cough suppressant\*\*** – (e.g., ones with dextromethorphan) – For a dry cough without mucus. May cause drowsiness. People with glaucoma or problems urinating should avoid ones with diphenhydramine.

**Decongestant\*\*** – (e.g., Sudafed<sup>®</sup>) – For stuffy and runny nose, postnasal drip, allergies, and fluid in the ear. Don’t use if you have high blood pressure, diabetes, glaucoma, heart disease, history of stroke, or an enlarged prostate.

**Expectorant\*\*** – (e.g., ones with guaifenesin) – For a cough with mucus. Don’t give with an antihistamine.

**Laxatives** – (e.g., stimulant-types, such as Ex-Lax<sup>®</sup> and Correctol<sup>®</sup> and bulk-forming type, such as Metamucil<sup>®</sup>) – For constipation. Long-term use of stimulant-type can lead to dependence and to muscle weakness (due to potassium loss).

\* Follow your doctor’s advice for OTC medicines.

\*\* Do not give OTC medicines for colds, coughs and/or the flu to children under 6 years old. For children age 6 years and older, follow their doctor’s advice.

## 10. Resources

### Pain Relievers

**Acetaminophen** – (e.g., Tylenol®, Tempra®) – For pain relief. Reduces fever. Does not reduce swelling. More gentle on stomach than other OTC pain relievers. Can result in liver problems in heavy alcohol users. Large doses or long-term use can cause liver or kidney damage.

**Aspirin** – (e.g., Bayer®, Bufferin®) – For pain relief. Reduces fever and swelling. Can cause stomach upset (which is made worse with alcohol use). May be a factor in stomach ulcers and bleeding. Avoid if you: Take blood-thinning medicine; have an ulcer; have asthma; are under 19 years of age (due to its link to Reye’s Syndrome); and/or are having surgery within 2 weeks. High doses or prolonged use can cause ringing in the ears.

**Ibuprofen** – (e.g., Advil®, Medipren®, Motrin®) – For pain relief. Reduces fever and swelling. Especially good for menstrual cramps. Can cause stomach upset and ulcers. Take with milk or food. Can make you more sensitive to the effects of the sun. Don’t use if you are allergic to aspirin. Don’t use if you have ulcers, blood clotting problems, or kidney disease.

**Naproxen sodium** – (e.g., Aleve®) – For pain relief. Reduces fever and swelling. Can cause stomach upset and ulcers. Take with milk or food. Can make you more sensitive to the effects of the sun. Don’t use if you are allergic to aspirin. Don’t use if you have ulcers, blood clotting problems, or kidney disease.

## 9. Overhaul Your “Medicine Cabinet”

The medicine cabinet in a bathroom is not a good place to store medicines. Dampness and heat can shorten the shelf life of some medicines. Your “medicine cabinet” should be in a cool, dry place, such as a top shelf of a closet. If there are children in the house, keep all medicines and vitamins locked in a high place, well out of their reach.

**UAWTrust.org** - Trust website with plan documentation, copies of communications, benefit information and links to additional resources.

**medco.com®** - Register today to order refills, check order status, compare medication costs, use My Rx Choices® to find potential lower-cost options for your long-term medications, receive time-sensitive alerts and reminders, and much more.

**Low Cost Generics list** - Did you know Medco has a list with hundreds of low-cost generic medications for \$10 for a 90 day supply through mail order? Register at medco.com or call Medco at 1-866-662-0274 to find out if your generic medication is on the list.

**Smoking Cessation** - Do you want to quit smoking? If you are a Blue Cross Blue Shield member call 1-800-775-BLUE (2583) to enroll in quit the nic!

**Diabetes Help** - Are you diabetic? Did you know that a diabetes education classes are a covered benefit? Learn tips on diet and exercise, and proper use of your medications. Ask your Doctor to refer you to a class in your area. You may also call contact a Medco Diabetes Specialist Pharmacist by calling Medco member services at 1-866-662-0274 and asking to speak with a pharmacist.

*\*If you are a member of an HMO or MA plan, please contact your insurance provider to learn more about their programs.*

---

### For More Information, Contact:

National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM)

<http://nccam.nih.gov>

U.S. Food and Drug Administration

[www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov)

---