



A Nonprofit Advancing Best Practices PO Box 247 Portland ME 04112 www.PreventMedicalError.org

**Here are some best practices that are known to make medical treatment more efficient and effective. These simple things can have a big impact.
Please share and discuss them with your providers.**

1. Prescription Drugs and Supplements (becoming an informed consumer)

Drug reactions and interactions can be *life saving*; however, even when drugs are prescribed correctly, or if they are prescribed incorrectly or misused, the resulting drug interaction(s)/reactions can also be life-threatening.

If you take prescription drugs or supplements remember the following:

- Adverse drug events (ADEs) are one of the leading causes of death in this country.
- It is estimated that ADEs kill more Americans every year than strokes or auto accidents.
- American women have more drug reactions than men.
- Many drugs approved before 1990 did not include women in drug trials.
- Many drugs do not have pediatric indications.

The good news is that many life-threatening ADEs are also preventable. Before taking any prescription drug or supplement, ask questions and become informed. Pharmacies and supplement vendors all offer patient-based information. You can also check FDA's Medwatch site: <http://www.fda.gov/medwatch/> or a website like Medscape <http://www.medscape.com> for information (note: ask providers to recommend an information source that is evidence based). If you are going to be taking the drug for a long period of time, you might want to search an internet support group site to see what other patients have posted about side effects, efficacy etc, and print out any anecdotal information for your provider(s).

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If there is any monitoring, testing or follow-up testing that is required, be sure to get prescriptions or standing orders, mark the testing dates on your appointment calendar, and try to make sure that the laboratory sends you and all of your treating physicians the results in advance of your next appointment(s). Determine if, when, and how to follow-up on the prescription; and who should notify other healthcare providers about medication changes, and when and how they will do this.

If you have not already done so, you may want to ask your healthcare providers whether or not they have ever received or hope to receive sponsorship, funding for studies, or any other compensation from any pharmaceutical, device or supplement company so that you can be aware of any potential conflicts-of-interest.

- Precautions:

Before you take any drug or supplement, wash your hands! If a sink is not readily available, use sterile wipes or baby wipes to clean your hands.

To maintain efficacy and safety, drugs need to be shipped, dispensed, and stored properly. Always read the product label and/or insert or ask your pharmacist or doctor about how to store your medication or supplement, and follow the directions. Drugs and supplements should NEVER be exposed to extremes in temperatures or humidity, and should not be used if they have been mishandled or are beyond the discard date.

2. Side-Effects (dates matter)

All drugs and supplements have side effects.

Ask your healthcare providers to work with you regarding potential side-effects, drug/drug and/or drug/supplement interactions BEFORE they prescribe a medication or supplement. Keep a copy of the pharmacy drug information sheet or the drug insert information in your medical binder and/or PDA.

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Important questions that you might want to ask your provider(s) are:

- What type of side-effects should I expect and when should I expect them;
- What type of side-effects might indicate a problem and warrant a phone call to the provider; and
- When and whom to call about which side effects.
- Do not rely on pharmacy label discard dates; ask your pharmacy to show you the manufacturer's packaging, and write down the drug batch lot number and actual drug expiration date, or have the pharmacist do this for you and write it down on the receipt. Cross-reference the pharmacy label discard dates with product packaging

expiration dates that are stamped on the side of the manufacturer's packaging. You can also ask your pharmacist to write the package expiration date on your pharmacy receipt or prescription bottle. Contact your physician and your pharmacist immediately if there is something amiss with the expiration date, product packaging, or the drug. You can also contact your state board of pharmacy.

- Precautions:

Work by the "rule of three"; try never to take more than three things that can cause the same side-effect. If you do take three or more medications and/or supplements that can cause the same side effect, list the side effect on your meds list as a possible interaction that needs to be monitored, and /or as a treatment class that is contraindicated.

3. Generic Drugs and Supplements (an important warning about outsourced manufacturing).

Before having a prescription for a generic drug filled, or before buying a supplement, ask for the country of origin of the drug; i.e. the country where the prescription drug or device drug or the supplement was MANUFACTURED. Similar to food and other items, increased numbers of supplements, prescription components, and/or finished generic drugs are currently being

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subcontracted by American, Canadian and other companies to companies and subsidiaries in China, India, or Croatia, or manufactured by one of several fast growing Indian generic drug manufacturers. Some pharmaceutical and medical device companies are closing manufacturing plants in well-developed countries and moving manufacturing to Asia.

IMPORTANT PRESCRIPTION SAFETY TIPS:

Have the pharmacist check their on-shelf stock and provide you with the name of generic drug company and the country where the drug was manufactured, and/or the name of any subcontractor, their country of origin and the country where the drug was manufactured.

Ideally, you would like your prescription or supplement to be manufactured in a well-developed country because developed countries have more advanced infrastructure (water, electricity and sewage systems are examples) and distribution networks. They also usually have more effective oversight and regulatory systems in place, and lower documented rates of drug tampering and adulteration. Read vitamin and supplement labels to find out the country of origin and expiration date.

- Precautions:

Different brand name, biologic drug and generic drug companies often use different sources for active product, dyes and excipients (drug binders and fillers).

Differences in fillers, dyes, coatings and active pharmaceutical ingredients or active product ingredients (APIs) can cause severe and potentially fatal allergic reactions, drug reactions or drug interactions. Generic drug, biologic drug and supplement ingredient differences can also change the way that a drug or supplement is metabolized and render it ineffective or, worse still, toxic. For example, a brand name antibiotic may have a coating, but the generic version may not have the same coating. The generic antibiotic that does not have the same coating may be dissolved and rendered useless by the hydrochloric acid in your stomach, and your infection may only be partially treated, or may take longer to treat. Have your pharmacist and physician "red flag" these manufacturers and/or any problematic ingredients. Promptly report any new symptoms or concerns to your physicians and pharmacist.

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IMPORTANT SAFETY TIPS:

- If you have concerns, you or your prescriber can ask your pharmacist or other provider to check the various generic brand excipients or brand of their shelf stock before they dispense or administer your prescription. Ask them to get permission from the prescriber to dispense the generic, device or other prescription brand that best suits your needs.
- If your prescription has refills, you can ask your prescriber to write down dispense as written - DAW – and/or – Medically Necessary- and the name of their preferred generic drug, prescription drug or prescription device brand name and, if applicable company name on their prescription. This can help ensure a more consistent therapeutic outcome. Ask for a copy, and ask your pharmacist or other provider to note this in their records.
- If your pharmacist is not able to or not allowed to dispense the preferred generic, device or brand, you can:

A. Have your pharmacist contact your prescriber and ask for permission to fill the prescription with a suitable alternative;

B. Locate a pharmacy that carries or, if you can wait, is willing to order your preferred prescription brand and have the prescription filled at that pharmacy;

C. Preferred generic drug issues:

1. Have your prescriber write a new prescription for the brand name drug;
2. Have the generic drug compounded by a compounding pharmacy

PRECAUTIONS FOR THOSE WITH DIABETES, ALLERGIES OR OTHER SENSITIVITIES:

If you are diabetic or have allergies or sensitivities, remember to check drug, supplement and vitamin excipients (binders, coatings and fillers) for anything that might affect glucose levels, trigger an allergic reaction, or trigger a sensitivity reaction. Check the ingredient list of different supplement and vitamin brands before you purchase them.

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Remember, your pharmacist is one of your health care team members, and they are a great (and in most cases, free) resource so take advantage of their knowledge. Talk to your health care provider(s) to find out whether you should collaboratively devise a schedule for taking your medication at the same time each day, and whether it should or should not be taken with food, for example.

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