

Taking Pain Medicine Safely

Pain medicines can ease your pain and help you continue a healthy, productive life. They are likely to be part of a treatment plan for chronic pain, but it is important to closely monitor your medicine usage.

The following are basic guidelines that will help you take your pain medicine safely, a list of side effects for pain medicine, and overdose symptoms.

Ask your doctor if you have any questions about your pain medicine.

Guidelines for Pain Medicine

Take medicines as prescribed.

- Do not change your dose without talking to your doctor first. Taking too much can result in serious side effects and death. Decreasing your dose too fast can cause withdrawal.

The goal is reasonable pain relief.

- Pain medicine is prescribed to help achieve reasonable pain relief.
- Pain medicine won't always take away all of your pain.
- The goal of pain medicine is to make one's pain more manageable and make daily life easier.

Do not drink alcohol while taking pain medicine.

- Mixing alcohol and pain medicine is a deadly combination. Do not do it!

Tell your doctor about all medicines you take.

- Taking prescription medicines with alcohol, street drugs, herbs, supplements, or even some over the counter medicines can be harmful.
- Talk to your doctor or pharmacist before using any of these things while taking a prescription medicine.

Keep medicines safe.

- Keep out of the reach of children and pets. Call 911 if your child accidentally swallows medicine. Call your local vet if your pet swallows medicine.
- Store medicines in a cool, dry, dark place - not in the bathroom or in the kitchen near moisture or heat.
- Secure them so other people won't be tempted to steal or abuse your medicines.

Do not use medicine that has expired or that doesn't look or smell right.

- Call your pharmacist for instructions on how to dispose of your medicines or where you can take them for safe disposal. Also ask your healthcare team to print the "Getting Rid of Your Medicines" patient education document.
- Do not put expired medicines down the sink, garbage disposal, or toilet.

Never share your medicines or take someone else's medicine.

- Sharing prescription medicine is illegal.
- It is also VERY dangerous.

Do not drive or operate heavy machinery while taking prescription pain medicine.

- Pain medicine often causes drowsiness.

Use only one pharmacy.

- Fill all your prescriptions at the same pharmacy.
- This will help identify any possible drug interactions.

Follow these acetaminophen guidelines.

- Some pain medicines have acetaminophen or Tylenol® in them (Lortab®, Vicodin®, Percocet®).
- Adults should not take more than 3 grams (3,000mg) of acetaminophen in 24 hours.
- Too much acetaminophen can damage your liver.
- Acetaminophen is also in many over the counter medicines. Read the label carefully.

Common Side Effects of Pain Medicine.

- Drowsiness
- Confusion
- Dry mouth
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Sweating
- Constipation

To minimize side effects, take your medicine with food, stay hydrated (drink at least eight 8-ounce glasses of fluids per day), and take an over-the-counter stool softener.

Symptoms of Overdose

- Extreme sleepiness
- Trouble breathing
- Confusion
- Blue lips or fingernails
- Clammy cool skin
- Difficulty waking up

If you suspect drug overdose, call 911 immediately.

If you have any questions or concerns, call your healthcare team at the main number - 732-235-2465.

If you are having problems during business hours (8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.), please call 732-235-2465 and the operator will direct your call. If it is after business hours, on a holiday or weekend, please call the same number and our answering service will assist you.