

REMEMBER:

Talk with your health care provider if you have questions about your medications.



The Importance of Understanding Your Medications

Medications play an important role in managing illnesses, but they can also be harmful if taken improperly. This brochure has tips and information to help you understand your medications and how to take them correctly and safely.

Types of Medications

Prescription medications: Medications that require a prescription from your health care provider and are dispensed at a pharmacy.

Over-the-counter (OTC) medications:

Medications you can buy without a prescription, such as cold and cough medications, ibuprofen or laxatives.

Dietary supplements:

Vitamins, minerals or herbals intended to be added to one's diet for health benefits. They come in different forms including, teas, capsules, extracts and powders.



**Samaritan
Health Plans**

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154444-0120

Medications Matter



**Samaritan
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A wellness publication prepared
for Samaritan Health Plans members

Medication Side Effects

What are they and when can they happen?

A side effect is an unwanted or unexpected effect to the body and may vary for each person. Common side effects include upset stomach, dry mouth and drowsiness. They can happen any time you start or stop a medication, or any time you increase or decrease the amount you take.

Watch for Interactions

Drug-drug interactions occur when two or more medications taken together cause a side effect. For example, taking aspirin and a blood thinner, such as warfarin, together can cause excessive bleeding.

Drug-food interactions occur when a medication taken with a certain food or drink causes the medication to work differently. For example, grapefruit juice can prevent the body from breaking down some medications, causing the medication to stay in your body longer than it should.

Drug-alcohol interactions occur when medications are mixed with alcohol. They can interact harmfully even if not taken at the same time. Common medications that can interact with alcohol include, anti-anxiety, anti-depressant and sleep medications.

If you experience a drug interaction or side effect from a medication you are currently taking, talk to your health care provider immediately.

Medication Safety

To stay safe and get the most benefit from your medications:

DO the following:

- ✔ Take medications exactly as prescribed by your health care provider.
- ✔ Take your medications at the right time every day. They work better when taken on a regular schedule.
- ✔ Finish your prescription even if you start to feel better. Talk with your health care provider before you stop taking a medication.
- ✔ Use the same pharmacy to fill all your prescriptions. They can help you keep track of the medications you are taking.
- ✔ Keep all your medications out of the reach of children and pets.
- ✔ Ask your health care provider or pharmacist about how to safely dispose of medications.

DO NOT do the following:

- ✘ Use medications from a previous illness, unless instructed to do so by your health care provider.
- ✘ Stop taking medications without first talking to your health care provider.
- ✘ Use medications that were prescribed to someone else.
- ✘ Use any medications past their expiration date.

Important Tips

Keep health care providers up-to-date:

Review your medication list with your health care provider at each appointment. Discuss all prescriptions, OTC medications, dietary supplements or creams you are using.

Speak with your health care provider:

If you are unsure about a medication you are taking, or the way it makes you feel, talk to your health care provider. If you have difficulty taking, or remembering to take a medication, be sure to discuss this with your health care provider as well.

Know your medications: Know the name of each medication you take and understand why you take it and how it helps you.

