

# *What You Should Know About Medicine Safety*



  **Blue Cross  
Blue Shield**  
of Rhode Island  
Your Plan for Life.™



In case of accidental poisoning, please contact the National Poison Control Hotline at 1-800-222-1222.

If you have any questions about the information in this booklet, please call Customer Service at the telephone number on the back of your Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island member ID card.

*About 44 percent of Americans buy medicines each month, and many people experience harmful side effects. That's why, as your healthcare partner, we want to help you use medicine safely.*

***This booklet can help you learn more about:***

- Buying, storing, and taking medicines
- Talking with your doctor
- Avoiding harmful effects



Use the form in the pull-out section of this booklet to list the names of all your medicines. Then review this list with your doctor at least once a year. Your doctor will tell you if you can cut back on or stop taking any of your medicines.



## Taking Medicines

Taking prescribed medicine may seem easy. But studies show that many people are at risk because they don't always follow instructions on labels, including warnings.

### ***To take your medicine safely:***

- Read all information that comes with your prescriptions (medicines ordered by your doctor).
- Measure liquid medicines with a medicine dropper, spoon, or cup.
- Take the proper dose at the same time(s) each day.
- When you take medicine at night, turn on a light. Then check to make sure that you're taking the right one.
- Finish all your medicine as directed, even if you feel better. This is especially true for antibiotics (medicine that fights certain infections). Most antibiotics won't work right if you don't finish the entire prescription.
- Talk to your doctor before you stop taking a medicine. Many medicines must be stopped gradually to allow your body time to adjust.
- Tell your doctor or pharmacist (the person who fills your prescription at the pharmacy) right away if you're having problems or side effects.
- Don't share your medicine with other people. Take only medicine that is prescribed for you.

## Buying Prescription Medicines

***Please keep these points in mind when buying medicine:***

- Refill prescriptions at pharmacies five days before you need them.
- Reorder mail order medicines two weeks before you need them.
- Tell your doctor and pharmacist about your allergies and sensitivities to foods and medicines.
- Always ask any questions you have about the medicine you're buying.
- When you receive your medicine:
  - Make sure that you have all your prescriptions.
  - Make sure that your name is on the labels.
  - Open bottles and look at your medicine. Don't take it if its shape, color, taste, smell, or feel is unusual. Double check with the pharmacist first.

- Also talk to your pharmacist if your medicines look different. For example, if your medicine came as tablets last time, but it's capsules this time, tell the pharmacist.
- Read all labels and instructions carefully.
- Save all information that comes with your medicine. It explains what your medicine is used for and possible side effects.

Also try to stay with the same pharmacy. That pharmacy will come to know your medical history. (This means information about all your past diseases, treatments, and medicines.) Knowing your history will help your pharmacy warn you about any interactions (the way medicines work together).





## Interactions

Please tell your doctor or pharmacist about all the medicines you take. Be sure to include:

- Prescriptions
- Over-the-counter medicines
- Vitamins
- Herbal supplements

All of the medicines listed above—as well as what you eat and drink—can have an effect on certain medicines. Lab results can also be changed by how your medicines mix with food, drinks, or alcohol.

Take a minute to review the following over-the-counter medicines, supplements, and herbal remedies. If you take any of these items, talk to your

doctor. They are known to strengthen or weaken prescription medicines.

- Cimetidine (Tagamet®)
- Acetaminophen (Tylenol®)
- Ibuprofen (Advil®)
- Naproxen sodium (Aleve®)
- Cold and cough medicines (Sudafed®)
- Alcohol
- Weight-loss supplements
- Ginseng
- Green tea
- St. John's wort

## Storing Medicines

Did you know that medicines shouldn't be kept in the bathroom? Or in your car? Moisture and high or low temperatures can affect your medicine.

### *Here are more tips for storing medicine safely:*

- Store all medicines out of the reach of children and pets.
- Ask the pharmacist if your medicine should be refrigerated. If not, keep it at room temperature away from sunlight.

## Throwing Away Old Medicines

- Clean out your medicine chest every year.
- Take unused, unneeded, or expired medicines out of their original containers. Throw these containers in the trash.

- Mix the old medicines with other trash, like used coffee grounds or kitty litter and put them in nonbreakable containers, such as empty cans or sealable bags.
- Also throw out:
  - Expired eye and ear drops, sunscreen, and other liquids.
  - Any medicine that has changed color.

Keep in mind that some medicines are harmful to the local water supply.

### *To learn more refer to:*

- Your local pharmacy to see if they have medicine disposal programs.
- The American Public Health Association at (202) 777-2742.
- [www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/news/press07/022007.html](http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/news/press07/022007.html)





## Going Away?

Here are some medicine safety tips to use while traveling.

### *Two weeks before leaving*

- Ask your doctor or pharmacist:
  - If you should stay out of the sun.
  - To help you write a plan to take your medicines if you'll be moving through time zones.
- Order and pick up any prescriptions.
- Call your airline to find out if there are any rules on carrying medicines and bottled substances onboard planes.

### *While packing*

- Take your doctor's and pharmacy's phone numbers with you.
- Make sure your name is on all prescription labels.
- Plan to avoid over-the-counter medicines in other countries.
- Place medicines in your carry on.
- Take extra medicine in case you're delayed getting home.
- Bring a medical waste container (box for used needles) if you use needles and syringes.

## What's in Your Medicine Chest?

It's wise to list all your medicines, their strengths, and dosages.

### *Include everything you take:*

- Prescriptions
- Over-the-counter medicines
- Vitamins
- Herbal remedies
- Nutrition pills
- Respiratory therapy medicines

If necessary, you may want to ask your doctor's staff for help. *We've included the pull-out form on the opposite page* to help you keep track of your medicines. Keep your medicine list up-to-date. Then, take it with you whenever you visit your doctor.

**If you have trouble reading or understanding your doctor's orders, please let him or her know. You may want to bring someone with you to doctor visits. This person can help you take notes and ask questions.**

### *Folding instructions for the Medication Tracking Pocket Card*



1 Tear away pocket card from the perforated spine of the brochure. Leave card folded in half as it appears.



2 Turn card over so tracking card on back is facing you.



3 Next, fold the right side in first, then the left.



4 Now you have your handy Medication Tracking Pocket Card that will easily fit in your pocket or purse.



5 When unfolded the full medication card is visible and ready for use.







## Talking With Your Doctor

When your doctor prescribes medicine, please ask questions to be sure the medicine will work best for you. Here's what you may want to ask:

### *About your healthcare needs*

- Why do I need to take this medicine?
- How will it work in my body?
- Does this medicine take the place of anything else I take?
- Can I reduce or stop this medicine with lifestyle changes?

### *Taking medicine properly*

- While taking this medicine
  - Should I avoid certain foods, liquids, alcohol, or anything else?
  - Do I need any lab tests?
- What is the dosage?
- How long should I take this medicine?
- What time of day should I take it?

### *Special instructions*

- Is this medicine taken with food?
- Should I take it whole, chewed, or crushed?
- Do I need to stop driving or using machinery?

### *Avoid interactions*

- Are there any side effects (e.g., dizziness, sleepiness, nausea)?
- When should I call you about them?
- Should I worry about interactions (how this new medicine will mix with other medicines in my body)?
- Should I stay out of the sun?

Also, be sure to ask how you can learn more about your medicines, as well as your medical condition.

It's important to tell your doctor if you smoke, how much alcohol and how many caffeinated beverages you drink, and about any recreational drug use. It may be hard to talk about these personal habits, but doing so will help you avoid harmful interactions. You can be assured that your doctor must keep this information confidential in accordance with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (a U.S. law that protects the privacy of your healthcare information).



## Learn More About Safe Needle Disposal

- Safe Needle Disposal: Visit [www.safeneedledisposal.org](http://www.safeneedledisposal.org) or call 1-800-643-1643.
- Sharps® Mail Back System: Visit [www.sharpsinc.com](http://www.sharpsinc.com) or call 1-800-772-5657.



## Using Needles and Syringes

If your medicine requires injections (shots), your medical provider will show you how to inject it.

### *Here's a list of steps:*

1. Wash your hands.
2. Clean the injection site (the place on your body where the needle will go) with soap and water, rubbing alcohol, or alcohol pads.
3. Use a new needle each time.
4. Rotate injection sites. Do not inject into the same spot over and over again.
5. Don't share needles or syringes. Only use your own.

After using needles and syringes, dispose of them (throw them out) properly to protect your health, *and the health of others.*

### *Here are some tips for doing just that:*

- Don't recap needles.
- Don't put them in the garbage.
- Don't put needles down storm or sewer drains.
- Don't put needles down the toilet.
- Put used needles and syringes in a medical waste container right after using them. These containers are made for the safe disposal of needles and syringes. (Sharps® is one brand that you can buy online and at your local pharmacy.)
- Never throw medical waste containers in recycling bins or in the trash.
- Bring used medical waste containers to drop-off centers or mail them back as directed on the container's label.

## Buying Medicines on the Internet

Look for the oval Verified Internet Pharmacy Practice Sites™ (VIPPS®) symbol when buying medicine online. Sites with this symbol are approved by the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy.

***Some online sites have been known to sell counterfeit (fake) medicines for:***

Diflucan®	Lipitor®	Sustiva®
Lamisil®	Procrit®	Zocor®

That's why you need to use caution when buying medicines on the Internet.



## Buying Medicines From Other Countries

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) helps ensure that medicines within the United States are safe and effective. However, there's no guarantee that medicines you buy outside the country will be safe, or even work right.

***Please keep in mind that medicines from other countries could:***

- Be counterfeits
  - They may look like a U.S.-approved product, but not contain the same ingredients.
- Have unknown ingredients
  - Medicines from other countries are not always tested for safety. They could contain addictive or harmful additives (additional ingredients).
- Require a doctor's supervision
  - You may need to be monitored while taking these medicines to make sure they're working right and not causing harmful side effects.
- Make it hard for your doctor to treat any complications
  - It may be hard for your doctor to find information on foreign medicines if you have problems taking them.



For more information on  
buying imported drugs,  
please visit [www.FDA.gov](http://www.FDA.gov).





**Your Plan for Life.™**

[www.BCBSRI.com](http://www.BCBSRI.com)

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