



Healthy Living for Elders: Use Your Medicines Safely!¹

Paulina Wittkowsky, Linda B. Bobroff, and Emily Minton²

This document is best viewed and printed in its pdf format [Click Here](#).

Medicines can help us feel better and improve our health, but if we don't use them correctly, they can make us feel worse or even cause major health problems. To use your medicines safely, keep the following tips in mind.

Keep your health care providers informed.

Make sure your doctor and pharmacist know all the medicines you are taking. This includes prescription and over-the-counter medicines, herbal products, and vitamin/mineral supplements. Also, remind them about any drug allergies or reactions you have had to medicines in the past.

Do “one-stop shopping” for all your medicines.

Fill all of your prescriptions at the same pharmacy. This will keep all of the prescription medications you take on one record. Your pharmacist will be able to alert you and your physician of possible problems. Let your pharmacist know if any of your doctors tell you to stop taking any of your medications so it can be noted on your record.

Make sure you can read the medicine label and understand the directions.

Ask the pharmacist to use a larger font on your prescription if it is hard to read. Or, you can use a magnifying glass to read small print. Remember to read labels on over-the-counter medicines.

Keep a record at home of all the medicines you take.

Keep one copy of your medicine record in your medicine cabinet or desk and carry one with you. The record should contain the following information for each medication:

- the name of the medicine
- the reason why you take it
- when you take it (days of the week and/or time of day)
- how much to take (the dosage)
- how long you need to take it (duration)

1. La versión español de este documento es *Vida Saludable : ¡Use Sus Medicinas Con Prudencia!* (FCS8594-Span). This document is FCS8594, one of a series of the Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. First published: June 2000. Revised May 2008, December 2009. Visit the EDIS website at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.

2. Paulina Wittkowsky, MS, RD, former education assistant and Linda B. Bobroff, PhD, RD, LD/N, professor, and Emily Minton, BS, ENAFS program coordinator; Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences; Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences; University of Florida; Gainesville 32611.

- any side effects (like sleepiness, constipation, or nausea)

Organize your pills in a pill box.

Pill boxes come in many sizes. Choose one that works for you, depending on how many pills you take each day.

Call your doctor right away if you have any problems with your medicines.

If you are worried that a drug might be doing more harm than good, talk to the doctor who prescribed it. He or she may be able to change your medicine to one that will be better for you. If you can't reach your doctor, call your pharmacist.

Check the expiration date on all medicine bottles.

Safely throw away any prescription and over-the-counter medicines that have passed their expiration date. See the next section to learn how to discard your medicines. Contact your doctor if you need a new prescription.

Discard medicines safely!

If possible, take unused medicines to your local household hazardous waste collection site. Otherwise, discard them safely in your trash using these steps:

1. Mix with water and either salt, ashes, coffee grounds, dirt, or cat litter.
2. Hide them in a bag, box or plastic container; seal with tape.
3. Put into the trash as close to trash pick-up day as possible.

Don't mix drugs with food and put into trash. They could be eaten by animals or people going through your trash looking for food to eat.

Ask your doctor or pharmacist if you should take your medicines with or without food.

Certain foods and beverages should be avoided when taking some medicines. Sometimes, it is better to take medicine with food to help avoid stomach irritation.

Do not take more or less than the prescribed amount of any drug.

Your doctor knows what dose is right for you. If you think you should be taking more or less than the recommended amount, talk to the doctor who prescribed it.

Do not drink alcohol when you take your medicines.

Some medicines may not work properly or may make you sick if you drink alcohol. Supplements and herbal products also can interact with alcohol and cause problems. Ask your pharmacist if alcohol can affect the medicines you are taking.

Never take someone else's prescription medicine.

Medicine prescribed by a doctor is not meant to be shared with anyone else. It may work for one person, but be dangerous for someone else.

If you have any questions about your medicines, ask your doctor or pharmacist!

To learn more about using medicines safely:

Call the Food and Drug Administration through its toll-free number: 1-888-463-6332, or visit this Website: <http://www.fda.gov>.

Visit the American Pharmaceutical Association's website at: <http://www.pharmacyandyou.org>.

Visit the Florida Department of Environmental Protection at <http://www.dep.state.fl.us> to learn how to safely dispose of unwanted medicines.

Ask your local Extension office if they offer programs on medication safety. Look for "Cooperative Extension Service" in the blue pages of your telephone book; in Florida, find your County Extension office at the University of Florida IFAS Extension website: <http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu/map>.