

## Healthy Living: Use Your Medicines Safely!<sup>1</sup>

Paulina Wittkowsky, Linda B. Bobroff, and Emily Minton<sup>2</sup>

Medicines can help us feel better and improve our health, but if we do not 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 or 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 potential 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.



Figure 1. Fill all of your prescriptions at one pharmacy to avoid potential drug-drug interactions.

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2. Paulina Wittkowsky, MS, RD, former education assistant; Linda B. Bobroff, PhD, RD, LD/N, professor; and Emily Minton, BS, former ENAFS program coordinator; Department of Family, Youth, and Community Sciences, UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

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## **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 for you to read, or use a magnifying glass to read small print. Remember to read labels on over-the-counter medicines as well as on prescription medicines.



Figure 2. Make sure you can read the labels on your prescription medicines. Ask your pharmacist to use a larger font if you have trouble reading the label information. Credits: iStock/Thinkstock.com

## **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 (Table 1) should contain the following information for each medicine:

- Name of the medicine
- 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)
- Any side effects you have experienced since taking it (e.g., sleepiness, constipation, or nausea)

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

If you are worried that a medication 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 not reach your doctor, call your pharmacist.

## **Check the expiration date on all medicine bottles.**

Safely dispose of 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.

## **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.

## **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. Make sure to ask your doctor or pharmacist what would be best.



Figure 3. Pill organizers can help you keep track of the medicines you need to take at certain times of the day and on certain days of the week.

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

Your doctor knows the safest dose for you to take. 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!

### **Discard medicines safely!**

The best way to dispose of unused medicines is to take them to your local household hazardous waste collection site. The US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) authorizes certain manufacturers, retail pharmacies, hospitals, or clinics to be collectors. You can find authorized collectors in your community by calling the DEA Office of Diversion Control Customer Support Center at 1-800-882-9539. You can also call your city or county government's household trash and recycling service (see blue pages in phone book) to see if a take-back program is available in your community. If your area does not have a medicine take-back program, you can discard most medicines safely in your household trash using these steps:

1. Mix medicines (do NOT crush) with ashes, coffee grounds, dirt, or cat litter.
2. Put the mixture in a plastic bag, box, or container and seal with tape.
3. Put the container into the trash as close to trash pick-up day as possible.

Do not 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.

**Learn more about using medicines safely from these organizations:**

- Food and Drug Administration, 1-888-463-6332, <http://www.fda.gov/Drugs/Resources/ForYou/Consumers/default.htm>.
- U.S. Department of Justice Drug Enforcement Administration, [http://www.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/drug\\_disposal/index.html](http://www.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/drug_disposal/index.html) (learn how to safely dispose of unwanted medicines).

- Ask your local UF/IFAS Extension office if they offer programs on medication safety. Look for “Cooperative Extension Service” in the blue pages of your telephone book, or, in Florida, find your County Extension office at the University of Florida’s IFAS Extension website (<http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu/map>).

Table 1. Medicine record

Medicine	Purpose	Day/Time	Dosage	Duration	Side Effects