



# Medication Safety A to Z

Safe purchasing, use, storage, and disposal of medications is essential to protect you, your family, and your community from the dangers of drug abuse, misuse, and overdose.



## COMMUNICATION

- Discuss your treatment plan with your prescriber or pharmacist<sup>1</sup>, including:
  - Name of drug, intended use, and expected action,
  - Medication **risks and side effects**,
  - **Prescription amount, frequency, and proper dosage**,
  - **Length of treatment and refill information** (if relevant)
- Be sure to confirm with your provider the origin and **authenticity** of any injectable medications given to you in a medical setting, such as treatments for arthritis or stroke rehabilitation, to ensure that the medications are not counterfeit or contaminated, do not contain the wrong active ingredient, or are not approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).



## PURCHASING

- If buying your prescription medications online, make sure your online pharmacy is legal and selling FDA-approved medications by checking the website at [www.vipps.nabp.net](http://www.vipps.nabp.net).<sup>2</sup>
- Purchase only from a **state-licensed pharmacy** that has a licensed pharmacist on staff. Verify licensure using the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy directory at [www.nabp.net/boards-of-pharmacy](http://www.nabp.net/boards-of-pharmacy).<sup>3</sup>
- Discuss with your pharmacist the possibility of any **drug interactions** between the medication you are buying and any other medications you are taking or plan to take, including over-the-counter medications, vitamins, and supplements.<sup>4</sup>
- Check the **label** and **warnings** on your medication to verify that the pharmacist correctly filled your prescription and that you understand the warnings.<sup>5</sup>

Is your online pharmacy legal and selling FDA-approved medications?  
Visit [www.vips.nabp.net](http://www.vips.nabp.net) for more information.



## USE

- **Read the packaging insert** and **follow the label and warnings on the bottle** to make sure that you are using your medications only as prescribed.<sup>6</sup>
- Never take medication that is not prescribed to you and never share your prescription medications.
- If you have any questions regarding use of your medication, consult your prescriber or pharmacist to discuss your individual treatment plan, rather than consulting the Internet, friends, or family for generalized information.<sup>7</sup>
- Review your entire medication therapy regimen with your pharmacist at least annually, or more often if you are experiencing a transition in health status or care.

Contact the Poison Control Center 24 hours a day, seven days a week in the event of an emergency: **(800) 222-1222**.

<sup>1</sup> Be An Active Member of Your Health Care Team, FDA, <http://www.fda.gov/downloads/Drugs/ResourcesForYou/UCM163211.pdf> (last visited Feb. 10, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> *Buying Prescription Medicine Online: A Consumer Safety Guide*, FDA, <http://www.fda.gov/Drugs/ResourcesForYou/ucm080588.htm> (last visited Feb. 10, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> *See Drug Interactions: What You Should Know*, FDA, <http://www.fda.gov/Drugs/ResourcesForYou/ucm163354.htm> (last visited Feb. 10, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

<sup>6</sup> Be An Active Member of Your Health Care Team, supra note 1.

<sup>7</sup> Be An Active Member of Your Health Care Team, supra note 1.

## Medication Safety A to Z (continued)



### STORAGE<sup>8</sup>

- Keep medication out of the reach of children, guests, and pets. If possible, store medications in a **locked container**.<sup>9</sup>
- **Fasten the lids** on pill bottles tightly. Childproof bottles are only effective if the lid is closed properly.<sup>10</sup>
- **Never mix different medicines in the same bottle.** You might end up taking the wrong one by mistake, or it is possible that some of the medicine could rub off on another and affect how well it works.<sup>11</sup>
- **Store medications at appropriate temperatures**, especially if refrigeration is required.<sup>12</sup> Ask your pharmacist or read the packaging insert if you have questions about proper temperature and humidity.<sup>13</sup>



### DISPOSAL

- Every six months, take **inventory** of your prescription medications, and dispose of any unused, unneeded, or expired drugs.<sup>14</sup>
- Follow any **specific disposal instructions** that might appear on the label or in the patient information that accompanies the medication.<sup>15</sup>
- Take advantage of community **drug take-back and disposal programs.** You can call your city or county government's household trash and recycling service office or your local police or sheriff's office to see if a program is available in your community.<sup>16</sup>
- When disposing of medicines, remove drugs from their original containers, put them in **non-descript containers**, and seal the container with tape.<sup>17</sup> The FDA recommends mixing unused medicines with coffee grounds, kitty litter, or another substance that makes the drug less appealing to children and pets, and unrecognizable to people who may intentionally go through the trash seeking drugs.<sup>18</sup>
- Using a pen or tape, destroy or conceal the label on the original medication container.<sup>19</sup>

Find a safe disposal site near you at [www.awartrx.org/disposal-sites](http://www.awartrx.org/disposal-sites).



### ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

- The FDA and the Environmental Protection Agency have found no indication of harmful environmental effects of flushing certain medications down the drain.<sup>20</sup> The specific medications that should be flushed are listed online at [www.claad.org/FDAflushlist](http://www.claad.org/FDAflushlist).
- **Inhalers do not harm the environment.** As of 2013, inhalers no longer contain chemicals that harm the environment and can now safely be disposed of through household trash.

Keep track of your medications at [www.lockyourmeds.org/inventory](http://www.lockyourmeds.org/inventory)

<sup>8</sup> *Tips on Safe Storage and Disposal of Your Prescription Medicines*, Nat'l Council on Patient Info. & Educ. (2008), [http://www.talkaboutrx.org/documents/safe\\_storage.pdf](http://www.talkaboutrx.org/documents/safe_storage.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> *Id.*

<sup>10</sup> *Id.*

<sup>11</sup> *Id.*

<sup>12</sup> *Safe Storage and Disposal of Prescription Medication*, Conn. Dep't of Consumer Prot., (2006), [http://www.ct.gov/dcp/lib/dcp/drug\\_control/pmp/pdf/parents.pdf](http://www.ct.gov/dcp/lib/dcp/drug_control/pmp/pdf/parents.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> *Tips on Safe Storage and Disposal of Your Prescription Medicines*, *supra* note 8.

<sup>14</sup> *Tips on Safe Storage and Disposal of Your Prescription Medicines*, *supra* note 8.

<sup>15</sup> *How to Dispose of Unused Medicines*, FDA, <http://www.fda.gov/forconsumers/consumerupdates/ucm101653.htm> (last visited Feb. 10, 2015).

<sup>16</sup> *Id.*

<sup>17</sup> *Id.*

<sup>18</sup> *Id.*

<sup>19</sup> *Safe Storage and Disposal of Prescription Medication*, *supra* note 12.

<sup>20</sup> *How to Dispose of Unused Medicines*, *supra* note 15.

Developed with input from 4Thought Products, Alliance for Aging Research, Alliance for the Adoption of Innovations in Medicines (Aimed Alliance), American Academy of Pain Management, American Chronic Pain Association, American Society for Pain Management Nursing, Center for Lawful Access and Abuse Deterrence, Gatekeeper Innovations, Generation Rx Initiative, Global Healthy Living Foundation, National Association of Drug Diversion Investigators, National Family Partnership, National Fibromyalgia and Chronic Pain Association, Pharmaceutical Diversion Education Inc., Project Lazarus, Rae Gleason Management and Consulting, U.S. Pain Foundation, and Zogenix.

For more information, visit [www.MedSafetyA-Z.org](http://www.MedSafetyA-Z.org)