

# Wise use of medicines

**Medicines can help to restore or preserve health, but if used incorrectly, they can cause serious problems. Ask your doctor and pharmacist for information and advice about your medicines and how to use them safely and wisely.**

## Types of medicines

The manufacture, packaging, labelling, storage, possession and sale of medicines are controlled by law. In Australia medicines are regulated according to their safety and are classified or scheduled as:

**Prescription Only Medicines** – which may be supplied by a pharmacist, on presentation of a prescription written by a medical doctor, a dentist or a nurse practitioner

**Pharmacist Only Medicines** – which may be supplied by a pharmacist, who must approve and advise on their use.

**Pharmacy Medicines** – which may only be supplied by a pharmacy. A pharmacist must be available to give advice about the medicines, when needed

**Unscheduled medicines – including Complementary Medicines** – which may be supplied to the public by any supplier. Complementary medicines include herbal or natural medicines, aromatherapy products, vitamins and minerals.

## Benefits and risks

Used wisely, medicines can play an important role in helping to prevent and treat illness or relieve uncomfortable symptoms. All medicines work best when combined with a healthy diet and lifestyle.

When using any type of medicine, there is always a risk that the medicine may cause unwanted side effects.

Things that increase the risk of side effects from a medicine include:

- Using the wrong dose or wrong directions
- Using other medicines at the same time
- Drinking alcohol, smoking or using illegal drugs
- Using someone else's medicine
- Certain medical conditions (e.g., kidney or liver problems)
- Pregnancy and breastfeeding
- Allergy to any of the ingredients.

## Understanding medicines

Your doctor and pharmacist aim to recommend the most appropriate medicines for your circumstances. If you are worried about or are having problems with your medicines, ask your doctor or pharmacist for more information and advice.

When choosing a medicine for yourself, find out as much as you can about its effects. Ask a pharmacist or doctor for advice.

### Some questions to ask your doctor

- What is my condition and how long will it last?
- What medicine have you prescribed and what does it do?
- How should I use the medicine?
- When will I start to see changes in my health?
- When should I have the medicine reviewed or stop using it?
- When I start this new medicine, should I stop using any of the others?
- Do I need any regular monitoring or tests (e.g., blood tests) while on this medicine?

### Some questions to ask your pharmacist

- What is the **drug name** and the **brand name** of this medicine? The same drug may have several different brand names.
- How much of this medicine should I use and how often should I use it?
- What time of day should I use it?
- How do I use, apply or insert the medicine or device (e.g., inhaler, patch, suppository)?
- What side effects do I need to watch for and what should I do if I experience a side effect?
- What can I do to reduce the chance of side effects?
- Will this medicine interact with other medicines, food or drink?
- Can I drink alcohol while using this medicine?
- Can I drive or operate machinery while taking this medicine?
- What should I do if I miss a dose?
- How and where should I store this medicine?
- Can I have a copy of the Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) leaflet for this medicine?

### Self care

- Check the drug name of your medicine, as well as the brand name – so you do not accidentally use different brands of the same medicine at the same time.
- Check the strength of your medicine.

- Read **all** labels and follow directions carefully.
- Use a standard medicine measure for all liquid medicines.
- Shake liquids and aerosols (puffers) well before taking a dose.
- Swallow tablets or capsules with a full glass of water. Do not swallow tablets while lying down.
- Some tablets should not be crushed. If you have difficulty swallowing, ask your pharmacist for advice.
- If you want to stop taking a prescribed medicine, check with your pharmacist or doctor first.
- If you want to change the time or dose of a medicine, check with your pharmacist or doctor first.
- If you plan to take a new medicine, check with your pharmacist or doctor first – especially if you are already taking other medicines, or if you are pregnant or breastfeeding.
- Always take the full course of medicine that you are prescribed, unless your doctor tells you not to.
- Do not use other people's medicines or give your medicines to other people.
- Keep a track of how many tablets and repeat prescriptions you have left, so you don't run out of your medicines.
- Keep an up-to-date list of all the medicines you use.
- Review your medicines with your doctor and pharmacist regularly. Tell your doctor and pharmacist about all the medicines you are using, including natural and herbal medicines,

## Important

Pharmacists can help people to manage their medicines safely. Pharmacy services include:

- Information and advice on medicines, medical conditions, health care and health care aids
- Medicine organisers, such as weekly tablet boxes or blister packs (e.g., Websterpak). This often helps people with memory problems or poor vision and those with complicated medicine regimens
- Preparing and maintaining a customised record of all medicines taken and a medicine chart to follow (e.g., MediList and Health Record card)
- Home Medicines Review (HMR) – a pharmacist can visit you at home to review all your medicines. An HMR must be arranged through your doctor.

medicines from the supermarket and medicines from the pharmacy.

## Storage

- Keep medicines in their original labelled containers.
- Store medicines in a cool dry place out of reach and sight of children. Follow any special storage instructions for your medicines.
- Return all out-of-date or unwanted medicines to a pharmacy for safe disposal. Do not put unwanted medicines down the toilet or a drain, or in a garbage bin.

## For more information

### **'Medimate' medicines information brochure**

From your pharmacist

Website: [www.nps.org.au](http://www.nps.org.au)

### **Veterans' MATES**

National Helpline

Phone: 1300 556 906

Website: [www.veteransmates.net.au](http://www.veteransmates.net.au)

### **Healthdirect Australia**

Phone: 1800 022 222

Website: [www.healthinsite.gov.au](http://www.healthinsite.gov.au)

### **Consumer Medicine Information (CMI)**

Your pharmacist can advise on CMI leaflets.

### **National Prescribing Service (NPS) Medicines Information**

Phone: 1300 MEDICINE (1300 633 424)

Website: [www.nps.org.au](http://www.nps.org.au)

### **The Poisons Information Centre**

In case of poisoning phone 13 11 26 from anywhere in Australia.

***Pharmacists are medicines experts.  
Ask a pharmacist for advice when  
choosing a medicine.***

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