

Taking Your
MEDICATION
Properly



Tips and advice on how to use
medication effectively

Tips and advice on how to use medication effectively



Whether they relieve a painful headache, treat your little one's fever, or control hypertension, medications are part of your daily life and essential to your health and that of your loved ones!

Taking them is no trivial matter, which is why it's important to know how to use, administer, and store them. In this guide you'll find valuable tips and advice regarding medications for children, adults, and seniors. Feel free to consult your healthcare professional if you can't find answers to your questions— he or she is there to help!

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Using medication:

A FEW BASICS

Whether you take medication on a regular or occasional basis, choosing the one that's right for you isn't always easy. This section offers a few tips to provide you with everything you need and help your healthcare professionals guide you in making the best choice possible.

Get in the habit of keeping with you at all times an updated list of prescription, as well as over-the-counter drugs and natural health products you take.

- » Ask your pharmacist to print out your medication list. Remember to get an updated list if your treatment changes. Keep it in your wallet—it could save you time and trouble:
 - In the event of a medical emergency, it will make things easier for healthcare workers.
 - When you visit a healthcare professional (doctor, dentist, or pharmacist) who doesn't have access to your records, it will provide a helpful overview.

Choose one pharmacy to be your regular pharmacy.

Going to the same pharmacy to buy prescription and over-the-counter drugs and natural health products is a good habit to get into. Medication is a complex field, and it is essential for your pharmacist to have all the information necessary to ensure a drug is safe for you. If you urgently require medication and are travelling or your pharmacy is closed, you may go to another pharmacy as an exception. However, not all pharmacy computer systems are linked, so information at one pharmacy may not necessarily be available at another. Loyalty to your pharmacy is a valuable asset for your health!



Always check with your pharmacist before buying an over-the-counter drug.

Although they don't require a doctor's prescription, over-the-counter drugs are not suitable for everyone! Serious adverse effects and interactions may occur if products are selected randomly. Taking the time to learn more before you buy can save you a lot of trouble. What's more, many over-the-counter drugs contain the same ingredients; combining them may increase the risk of poisoning. A number of cold products, for example, come in tablet, syrup, or hot drink form. Be careful—they all contain the same ingredients!

Don't take any natural health products before consulting your healthcare professional.

Although the word "natural" seems to have a positive connotation for health, natural health products are not free from side effects or potential interactions with medication. You should be as careful buying natural health products as you are medications. Before taking a product, check with your healthcare professional to see if it's right for your condition.

Never take medication or a natural health product on the advice of a family member, friend, or colleague.

Medication that is appropriate for one person is not necessarily appropriate for another! Even if your best friend swears by the new medication his or her doctor has prescribed to relieve his or her migraines, it doesn't mean this medication is right for you. There are several factors to consider, including symptoms, other health problems, and medication already being taken. Only your healthcare professional can analyze your situation and recommend the product that best suits your needs and health.



The ABCs of **STORING MEDICATION**



Medications are products that must be stored properly to guarantee their efficacy and stability. Quite often, your first reflex is to store them in the bathroom medicine cabinet when you come home from the pharmacy. While medicine cabinets are traditionally in the bathroom, the temperature fluctuations and humidity in the bathroom can damage medications and reduce their efficacy. It is therefore preferable to store them **between 15°C and 25°C in a cool, dry place away from light**, unless your healthcare professional indicates otherwise.

It is essential to always keep medication **out of reach of children**. Closet shelves or top kitchen cupboards that are not directly above a heat source are appropriate locations.

Furthermore, you should always **keep medications in their original packaging**. That way, you know how to use them, when they expire, and what problem they were prescribed for. For the same reasons, you should **never store different medications in the same container**. Lastly, you should not take medication that seems to have changed in appearance. If your medication seems different (e.g., has a different odour or colour), don't take it until you've talked to your healthcare professional.

Medications hate temperature fluctuations!

You should avoid storing medication in your car at any time. Always follow the storage directions that are on the package or provided by your healthcare professional. Medications that require refrigeration must be refrigerated and those that must remain at room temperature should not be kept in the refrigerator!



Do a cleanout!

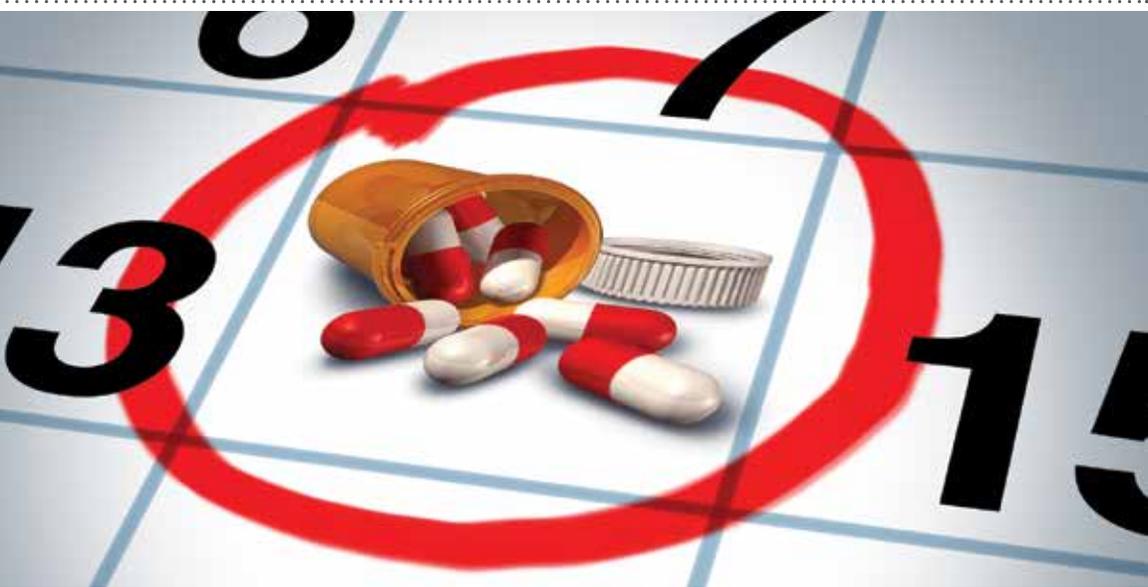
The expression “spring cleaning” applies not only to your home, but also your medications. Take the time to check the expiration dates of your medications at least once a year so you can get rid of expired products. A cleanout prevents you from keeping drugs you don’t use anymore and inadvertently making a mistake.

Remember never to throw out drugs in the toilet, sink, or wastebasket, which may contaminate the environment. Take them back to the pharmacy instead so that they can be destroyed safely.

DID YOU KNOW THAT...

All drugs have an expiration date, which varies according to different criteria.

The expiration date is the point up to which the manufacturer guarantees a product is safe and effective. For over-the-counter drugs, look for this date directly on the container. For prescription drugs, refer to the expiration date printed on the pharmacy label. Be careful, however—there may be exceptions to the rule! Eye drops, for example, should be kept for no more than 30 days after opening. If you're not sure, ask your healthcare professional to confirm the right expiration date.





Administering **MEDICATION TO CHILDREN**

Whether for a fever, cold, infection, or chronic illness, little ones need medication. The following steps will help you ensure they get safe and effective treatment:

1. Give them the right medication.

A number of over-the-counter drugs are available for children. They come in different forms (liquid, chewable tablets, suppositories, etc.). Before making your choice, take the time to check with a healthcare professional to see if a drug is appropriate based on your child's symptoms, age, and weight. If you already have the appropriate medication at home, check the expiration date.

**NEVER GIVE
CHILDREN
MEDICATIONS THAT
ARE MEANT FOR
ADULTS!**

They are not appropriate
and could be
dangerous.

2. Give them the right dose.

Over-the-counter drugs often have a dosage table on the label that's based on age. Remember that most medication dosages administered to children are based on their weight. You should therefore rely on your child's weight to calculate a dose that's just right. Ask your healthcare professional for calculation help if needed.

When you give your child medication, it's important to follow the prescribed dosage on the label or package. Make sure you understand the directions before administering medication. Below are a few questions you should ask yourself to ensure that treatment is effective while limiting possible side effects:

- » What dose should I administer?
- » How many times a day should I administer it?
- » At what times of day should I administer it?
- » How should I administer it (orally, in suppository form, in drop form, etc.)?
- » How long should I administer it?
- » How should I store it?



3. Properly measure out the dose to be given.

Now that you've selected your medication and figured out the right dose, you need to measure it out. A syringe or measuring cup is much more accurate than a household spoon. Be sure to measure accurately—a tiny difference in the dose can have a significant impact on the success and safety of treatment. If you are unsure of how to draw up the medication and measure out the dose, talk to your healthcare professional.

If it says so on the label, shake the product before drawing a dose. This ensures even distribution of the medication in the bottle and therefore a more accurate dose.

4. Get your child to cooperate when taking medication.

Convincing a child to take his or her medicine can be a major challenge. The child may totally refuse to cooperate or even get angry!

First of all, make sure your child isn't too tired or hungry when it's time for medicine. This will make him or her more receptive.

In the case of an infant, first try to comfort your child to make him or her feel secure. Administer the medication inside the cheek, then gently blow in the baby's face. This will make swallowing the medication easier.

When your child is old enough to understand, you can explain why he or she needs to cooperate and take medicine. Encourage your child and get him or her to participate by choosing either a syringe or measuring cup and what to take the medication with (water, juice, apple sauce, yogurt, etc.). Your child will feel involved and therefore make the task easier. You can also distract your child by attracting his or her attention to a toy or the TV. Pretend you're giving the medicine to a stuffed animal or doll. Children can be motivated to take their medicine if they see their stuffed animals doing it. Remind your child, however, that taking medicine is not a game. Be sure to congratulate him or her!

If your child spits up or throws up the medication, take the time to contact your healthcare professional to see whether it's necessary to repeat the dose.

The next section of this guide contains additional tips on what to do when your child refuses to take medicine because it tastes bad.

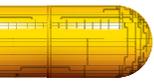
CAUTION!

Never let children think that medicine is candy! They may be likely to consume more of it or sample other drugs in the house and thereby risk being poisoned. Be sure to always keep medication out of reach of children and take the time to explain that YOU must be the one to administer it to them.

5. Write down the actual times you give medication.

In the hustle and bustle of daily life, managing medication can become a real hassle! How many times have you asked yourself if you did indeed give your child a dose or whether it was your spouse who did it? When medication is taken as needed or several times a day, you may find it hard to remember what time your child took his or her medicine and then wonder if you can give them a new dose. To avoid confusion, keep a calendar, a notepad, or even your smartphone on hand to plan a schedule to give yourself peace of mind.





When medication **TASTES BAD**

It's well known that not all medication tastes good, and make no mistake—some adults are more difficult than children! Fortunately there are tips for tricking your tastebuds. Here are just a few:

1. Mix medication with food.

Medication can generally be mixed with food. A little yogurt, ice cream, apple sauce, chocolate syrup, juice, or jam can mask the taste of medicine. Be sure, however, to add only a tiny bit of food as the entire mixture must be consumed to get the complete dose of medication.

Putting medication in an infant's bottle of milk is not recommended because the baby may associate the bad taste with the milk and refuse this essential food afterwards.

WARNING:

- » Avoid preparing mixes in advance as this may reduce the effectiveness of treatment.
- » Talk to your pharmacist before preparing mixes as some medication is incompatible with food.

2. Choose your favourite flavour!

Grape, cherry, bubble gum, fruity—some medication comes in a variety of flavours. Choosing your favourite flavour makes taking medicine more tolerable. Letting kids choose their flavour gets them involved in their treatment and makes them more cooperative.

3. Trick your tastebuds!

Some tricks help you “freeze” your tongue and prevent your tastebuds from tasting the medication. Eating ice cream or sucking on an ice cube just before taking medication, for example, can mask the taste. In the case of infants, a teething ring can be used.

You can administer medication using a syringe (for infants) or a straw placed in the back of the cheek (for adults). That way, the medication’s contact with the tastebuds is limited and the taste is not as strong. You can also quickly eliminate the bad taste of medicine by drinking a glass of water or juice or eating a cookie immediately afterwards.

Does it really matter if you

TAKE ANTIBIOTICS EXACTLY AS PRESCRIBED?



Antibiotics are drugs that help treat infections caused by bacteria, e.g., earache, sinusitis, pneumonia, or urinary infection. If your doctor prescribes an antibiotic, you must take it as directed and finish it to ensure its effectiveness.

How do antibiotics work and why are they sometimes ineffective?

There are several classes of antibiotics, which are not all designed to treat the same types of bacteria. Some, for example, are more effective against bacteria in the lungs, while others fight bacteria in the mouth. The doctor chooses an antibiotic based on the infection you have. Sometimes, however, bacteria become resistant to antibiotics, making it more difficult to treat certain infections.



Colds, flu, and certain other infections are caused by viruses. Antibiotics are therefore ineffective and not necessary.

What is antibiotic resistance?

Antibiotic resistance occurs when bacteria that are usually eliminated by an antibiotic are no longer sensitive to it. This happens when drugs are misused or used too much.

Inappropriate use of antibiotics allows bacteria to adapt to them and find a way to spread anyway. It's another good reason to follow the directions you receive when you get your antibiotics.

Have trouble swallowing pills?

Some pills can be cut or crushed to make them easier to swallow. Learn more from your pharmacist, as there are pills that must be swallowed whole and cannot be modified. Reduced effectiveness, increased side effects, and a very bad taste are some of the possible consequences when pills are cut or crushed inappropriately. Some medication comes in liquid or suppository form—just ask!

How can you

REMINDE YOURSELF TO TAKE YOUR MEDICATION?

People with chronic diseases such as diabetes or hypertension must take medication daily. If this is your case, you have surely wondered at one time or another whether or not you took your medication. It's perfectly normal to occasionally forget. However, it's important to reduce the odds of this happening as much as possible.

A number of things may increase the risk of forgetting:

- » Your dosage involves taking medication several times a day.
- » The prescribed times for taking medication are inconvenient (e.g., taking it with food in the morning if you don't eat breakfast or at night before bedtime if you work nights).
- » You don't feel any benefits of your medication because your disease doesn't cause any symptoms, or you don't feel any effects of your medication (e.g., a drug that reduces cholesterol).
- » You can't swallow the product.
- » You are unable to use the dispensing device (e.g., eyedropper, pump, syringe, etc.).
- » You lack motivation because you don't want to take medication, you experience side effects, or you don't understand why it's important to take this medication.

Below are a few tips and tools you may find useful:

Combine your medication with a daily activity. You forget less often when your medication is combined with a well-integrated activity of your daily life. Synchronize taking your medication with brushing your teeth or having a meal. Keep your medication in strategic places so that you can see it and think of taking it.

Fully understand how to use your medication. Carefully read the label and directions to find out how much to take and when and how to take it. If your medication comes with a dispensing device (syringe, eyedropper, or pump) that seems difficult to use, feel free to ask your healthcare professional to explain how to use it.

Do not stop taking your medication or reduce the dosage at any time because you feel better. **Do not change the dosage of your medication without first checking with a healthcare professional. Some drugs must be increased or reduced gradually and may otherwise affect your health.**

Check with your healthcare professional to see if you can reduce the number of times a day you take it. Going from four to two times a day may make you more willing to comply with treatment and thus reduce the risk of forgetting.

Keep a medication schedule. It will tell you when to take which medication and let you note down that you have taken it. You can also simply enter it in your agenda, on your calendar, or in your smartphone!

Get an alarm device to remind you when to take your medication.

You can use the alarm on your phone, alarm clock, or watch to remind you to take your medicine, or even download an alarm app for your smartphone. Devices designed specifically as medication reminders are also available.

Use a pill organizer to help manage your medications, especially when you take several different ones. The best-known brand of pill organizer sold in pharmacies is Dosett®. It consists of a box divided into compartments for times of day and days of the week. Simply place your capsules and pills in the right compartments and your week is completely organized, which will help you avoid forgetting. Pill organizers come in a number of sizes to accommodate any type of treatment or lifestyle.

However, if managing your medications becomes too complex, your pharmacist can take charge by preparing a medication organizer with your medications. The best-known brands are Dispill® and Distrimedic®. These medication management systems are made of plastic and paper and can be discarded after use. Learn more about the services available at your pharmacy from your pharmacist.



Travelling and medication:

HOW TO MAKE SURE YOU DON'T MISS THE BOAT

PLAN THE TRIP

Planning on taking a short business trip, an extended backpacking adventure, or a family vacation in a sunny destination? These trips generally require a lot of organization, especially if you take medication on a regular basis or change time zones. Below are a few recommendations to help you properly prepare your trip.

First, consult your healthcare professional or a travel clinic. Vaccinations to prevent infections such as travellers' diarrhea (commonly known as "la turista" in Spanish-speaking countries), malaria, and hepatitis A and B or medication may be required depending on the destination selected.

You should also check to see whether your current medication needs to be adjusted according to your schedule or the time difference. This is even more important if you take insulin or other medications for diabetes, because the time you take them often depends on when you have meals.

Take the time difference into consideration when a trip lasts more than 48 hours and the time difference is at least three hours.

BEFORE YOU LEAVE

Before you leave, make sure you have enough medication for the entire trip and a few extra days. The unexpected can happen all too quickly, so it's best to bring along extra to make sure you don't run out. What's more, certain drugs available in Canada are not available in other countries.

Before leaving, contact your airline to find out its policy on the transportation of medication. Also take the time to check with the Canadian embassy in the country you will be visiting, as the medication you're bringing in may be prohibited or allowed with restrictions. This may also apply to food supplements and natural or homeopathic health products sold over the counter here.

Think twice about buying medication abroad without medical advice. You could be sold dangerous or ineffective counterfeit drugs. Know the generic names of your medications—it will make going through customs easier and may be especially useful in the event of a health problem abroad. You can ask your pharmacist to add them to your prescription labels.

Bring a photocopy of your prescription and an updated list of your medications and keep them with your travel documents. This information will be useful if your products are lost or stolen.

DURING THE TRIP

Keep your medication in your carry-on to prevent it from getting lost. If your medication requires refrigeration, be sure to get something to keep it cold. You can also contact your airline to find out whether the plane has a fridge on board for storing passengers' medications. All medications should be left in their original containers or in labelled pharmacy vials.

Heading to the tropics? Be careful of the sun!

Not only can the sun have a harmful effect on your medications, some of your medications may make your skin more sensitive to the sun or your body more prone to dehydration. Keep your medications away from heat, humidity, and light. Be sure to stay well hydrated and use good quality sunscreen to get the most out of your vacation!



CONCLUSION

Proper use of medication is not always as easy as it looks. This guide was designed to help you learn some basics, tips, and advice to effectively integrate medication into your daily routine. Whether for a child, adult, or senior, at home or while travelling, there are always ways to make living with medication easier and avoid stress and mistakes! Remember to consult your pharmacist—he or she is a medication specialist!

Remember to take your medication as prescribed or recommended by your healthcare professional to get the best treatment possible.

Medications are designed to help you—use them effectively to support your health!



Sources and useful links:

ORDRE DES PHARMACIENS DU QUÉBEC

www.opq.org

OPQ – *Grand public* section – “Bon usage des médicaments”

OPQ – *Grand public* section – “Intoxication aux médicaments”

GOVERNMENT OF CANADA

healthycanadians.gc.ca/

“Antibiotic resistance facts and figures”

HEALTH CANADA

www.hc-sc.gc.ca

It’s Your Health section – “Antibiotic Resistance”

CANADIAN PAEDIATRIC SOCIETY

www.caringforkids.cps.ca/

Caring for Kids – “Antibiotics”

GOVERNMENT OF CANADA

travel.gc.ca

Travel and tourism section

INSPIRATION AND USEFUL SOURCES FOR PARENTS:

NAÎTRE ET GRANDIR

www.naitreetgrandir.com

References:

DEHAUT, Catherine et al. *Votre enfant et les médicaments*.
Montreal: Éditions du CHU Sainte-Justine, 2005, 332 pages.

Doré, Nicole and Danielle Le Hénaff. *Mieux vivre avec notre enfant de la grossesse à deux ans. Guide pratique pour les pères et les mères*. Quebec City: Institut national de santé publique du Québec, 2013, 776 pages.

In this GUIDE

- Using medication: A few basics
- The ABCs of storing medication
- Administering medication to children
- When medication tastes bad
- Does it really matter if you take antibiotics exactly as prescribed?
- How can you remind yourself to take your medication?
- Travelling and medication: How to make sure you don't miss the boat

Only pharmacists are responsible for pharmacy practice. They provide related services only on behalf of a pharmacist/owner and use various tools such as the Psst! (Plan to Stay in Shape Today) program tools.