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GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT MEDICATIONS

Why is medication information important?

Good health starts with good information. If you are on a medication, you should know why you are taking it. You should know what the medication is, how much and how often you need to take it, and whether to take the medication before, between, or after meals. This becomes more important as you get older and are taking more than one medication.

Why am I taking the medication?

Medications can be confusing, especially if you take them for more than one condition. If the label doesn't say what the prescription is for, ask your pharmacist. You may want to write on the label the reason you are taking the medication. This information could be important if you become ill and need help from a friends or family.

What is the medication?

Depending on your health care provider's prescription, the label may show a brand name or the generic (chemical) name. It is often less expensive to buy your prescription by its generic name than by the brand name. Although the color or shape of the drug may be different, there is usually no difference in quality between generic and brand name drugs.

How much, how often, and when?

Follow the dose and schedule written on the prescription label. Some medications are short acting and need to be taken more often. Others stay in the body longer and don't need to be taken as often. Some medications irritate the stomach, especially if there is no food in the stomach. It is best to take these medications with meals. Other medications work better if your stomach is empty. Always take your prescribed medication, especially an antibiotic, until it is all gone. Don't change your dose without consulting your health care provider, and never use medication prescribed for someone else. If you forget a dose of your medication, don't try to make up for it by taking more with the next dose.

What about side effects?

All medications can have side effects, such as headaches, skin rashes, dizziness, or nausea. Some side effects may be less obvious, such as weight loss or confusion. If you think your medication is causing side effects, call our office. Also, it is important to tell ALL of your health care providers about each medication that has been prescribed for you. Some drugs may cause serious side effects if they are combined with other medications. Over-the-counter medications can cause serious interactions with your prescription medication.

What can I do to help myself?

- Make sure our office knows about ALL the medications you are taking, prescription AND over-the-counter. This includes vitamins, herbals, etc. You should always keep an updated list of all your medications (including dosages and frequency) with you.
- KNOW your medications. Make sure they are clearly labeled.
- Follow the dose instructions and take ALL the medication prescribed by your health care providers. The only time you should stop taking your medication as directed is if you develop a side effect. Then you should contact your doctor immediately.
- Try to go to just one pharmacy. The pharmacist can then keep better records of all your medications.
- If your medication is liquid, shake the bottle well before you use it. Take tablets with a glass of water.
- If you think a medication is causing side effects, call the prescribing health care provider.
- Don't use medications that are out-of-date or prescribed for other people.
- Get rid of medications that are no longer needed and keep all medications out of the reach of children.
- Ask for regular bottle caps if you have trouble opening the childproof ones.
- You can buy an inexpensive daily medication reminder box from your pharmacy. The easiest kind to use has seven compartments, one for each day of the week.