

How to read the label on your medicine bottle

The label on your medicine bottle contains important information. Here is an example of a typical label for a prescription medicine. Your label may look different but it will show:

- Your name
- The name of your doctor
- The name, address and telephone number of the pharmacy
- The reference number of the prescription
- The name of the medicine and its strength
- Instructions on how to take the medicine
- The quantity of tablets/liquid.

Ask your pharmacist if you have any questions when you pick up your prescription.

Things to watch for

Sometimes when taking medicine, things we don't expect can happen. That's the time to call your doctor. Here are examples of signs to watch for:

- Skin rashes or itchiness
- Difficulty breathing
- Unusual headaches or dizziness
- Unexplained or easy bruising
- Mood changes
- A loss of appetite, nausea or vomiting
- Slurred speech, memory loss or impaired judgement
- Changes in sleeping patterns such as unusual drowsiness or recurring unpleasant dreams.

There is the possibility that these symptoms may be the result of the medication, but they could be due to other causes. In any case, contact your doctor or pharmacist immediately.

Keep it safe

- Keep your medicine in a cool dry place, out of sunlight.
- Some medicines are stored in the refrigerator while others are kept at room temperature. Ask your pharmacist.

- Don't keep your medicines in the bathroom. The heat and moisture could damage the medicine.
- Don't hoard medicines, unless they are part of your family First Aid kit.
- Store your medicine in its original container.
- Keep all medicines, including seemingly harmless medications like cough bottles, safely locked away and out of the reach of children.

How do I make my medicines work best for me?

Your pharmacist can answer many of your questions about the medicines you take.

Be sure to talk to your doctor or pharmacist.

- How often should I take the medicine?
- When should I take it? Before, with, after, or between meals? At bed time? Whenever I need it?
- Can I drive a car? What about physical exercise or air travel?
- What should I do if I miss a dose?
- How long should I continue taking it?
- How should I store my medicine?
- Any food or beverages I should avoid?
- Is there anything else I should know?

Helpful tips

If you have problems swallowing your medicine, your doctor or pharmacist may have some suggestions.

If you have trouble opening your container ask your pharmacist for a different type.

If you have problems remembering to take your medication or easily forget when you last took your medication, ask your pharmacist for advice on medication dispensers. This will allow you to plan your medication dispensing over a fixed period with the assistance of your Community Psychiatric Nurse or a relative/friend if required.

Drugs and pregnancy

If you believe you are pregnant or are planning a pregnancy, you must tell your doctor. The first three months of life are particularly hazardous for the foetus and ideally you should not take any drugs during this time. This applies to tobacco and alcohol as much as to any prescribed medicine.

Eligibility

Contact your local Health Board for information on:

- Drugs Payment Scheme
- Medical card holders are entitled to have certain medicines dispensed free of charge

For further information on medication contact your:

- Local Pharmacist
- Prescribing Doctor
- Community Psychiatric Nurse (Mental Health Service)



Facts you should know about the medicines you take* is one of a series of information fact-sheets developed by Mental Health Ireland, with support from Comhairle.

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* Adapted from 'Knowledge is the Best Medicine' with kind permission of The Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association.

Facts you should know about the medicines you take



Mental Health Ireland

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Whatever medicine you take, whether it's a tablet for hayfever or something you take every day for your heart, it is very important to understand what you are taking, why you are taking it, how to take it, and what the side-effects might be. The information in this leaflet Facts You Should Know About the Medicines You Take will help you to answer all the questions you have about your medicines.

To find out more, start by talking with your doctor or your pharmacist. That's what they're there for. Don't be afraid to ask questions. You have the right to ask. You have the right to know.

Drugs used in Psychiatry

Medication can be effectively used on its own or in combination with psychotherapy or counselling to treat symptoms of mental illness.

Medication may be given in the form of tablets or slow release injections depending on the condition or symptoms.

It is important to be aware of side effects or risks when taking medication or any special requirements, for example, blood tests.

Medication should be taken in accordance with the advice of your doctor.

Types of drugs – a brief overview

The drugs, which are prescribed medically, have been selected because of their ability to relieve the symptoms of mental illness and stabilise the various illnesses – the main groups are anti-depressants, tranquillisers and mood stabilizers. Another group of drugs, benzodiazepines or anti-anxiety drugs are effective in reducing anxiety but should be taken only for short periods not longer than a few weeks as they can cause dependence and are addictive. These drugs are available on prescription only.

Anti-depressants

Low levels of serotonin are thought to be a cause of depression and other related conditions. Medication like anti-depressants can bring the levels of this chemical back to normal. Anti-depressant medication may take two/three weeks

before full benefit is experienced. It is important to take medication even when you feel completely well as early discontinuation may precipitate relapse. Some people may need more than one course of treatment.

One group of anti-depressant drugs, the monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOI) requires patients to avoid certain foods, drinks and medicines. Patients on these drugs are given a warning card by their doctor or pharmacist which lists the things to avoid.

Anti depressant medication is not addictive.

Tranquillisers

Tranquillisers or neuroleptic medications are used to treat major illnesses like schizophrenia and psychotic depression. These drugs suppress a chemical, dopamine, thought to be over produced in people with schizophrenia.

Like other drugs used in the treatment of mental illness, this medication may need to be taken over a long period of time. Early discontinuation may precipitate relapse.

Treatment with major tranquillisers is not addictive. There may be some side effects – if you experience any of the following, you should inform your doctor:

- stiffness, restlessness and shakiness known as extra-pyramidal effects
- Sensitivity to light – you should be careful in bright sunlight – use a sunblock cream
- some people feel tired, dizzy or may be prone to weight gain.

Mood Stabilisers

Mood stabilisers are drugs used in the treatment of excessively "high" moods, irritability, increased energy and activity.

A relative or friend can play an important role in reminding or encouraging you to take your medication. Make them aware of possible side effects. Read the information leaflets and discuss the information with your doctor or Community Psychiatric Nurse.

Drugs & Alcohol

Alcohol is best avoided when a person is taking medication as it can lead to interactions with the medicines.

Things to know

With Your Doctor or Pharmacist

The more you know about your medicine, the more you become a team player in your own health care.

- Before visiting your doctor or pharmacist think about what you want to ask them.
- Make a list of your questions and take it with you.
- If you find it difficult to ask questions, take a friend or family member with you.
- If the answer confuses you, ask your doctor or pharmacist to explain it again. Tell them what you don't understand.
- If it will help you, write the answers down. Ask for written material on the subject so you can read it later.
- Tell your doctor about all of the medicines you are taking. Some medicines interact with each other, which can change the way they work.
- Talk to your doctor about any allergies or reactions you have experienced in the past.
- Make sure that you understand the instructions on how to take your medicine.
- Get to know your pharmacist. He or she is there to help and has a record of the different medicines you get from that pharmacy.
- It is advisable to get all your prescription medicines from the same pharmacy.
- If you find it hard to remember when to take your medicines, ask your doctor or pharmacist for some suggestions.

Remember

- you have the right to get answers to your questions.
- don't expect a prescription every time you visit your doctor. You may not need one.

Questions to Ask

Your doctor and pharmacist are the experts on your medicines. Here are some important questions to ask about your prescription medicine:

- What is the name of the medicine?
- Why am I taking it?
- What will it do for me?
- Is there anything I should do as well as taking this medicine?
- Is there anything that I should or should not eat or drink while taking the medicine?
- Do I have any alternatives to this medicine?
- Are there any side-effects? Which ones should I report?
- Do you want to see me while I'm taking this medicine? If so, when?
- What if I need a repeat prescription?
- Is there any patient information available about this medicine?
- Will this medicine affect any of the other medicines I am taking? (Remember to ask about prescription and non-prescription medicines)

At Home

- Take your medicine exactly as directed on the label. Too much or too little of your medicine could be harmful.
- If you forget to take your medicine, don't double the next dose. Do not take extra tablets to catch up. Ask your doctor or pharmacist for advice.
- Don't share your medicine with others or use medicine not prescribed for you.
- Finish all of your medicines unless your doctor tells you not to.
- Don't save a prescription for future use unless your doctor tells you to.
- When certain medicines are mixed with alcohol, the result can be harmful. Ask your doctor or pharmacist.
- Check expiry dates. Don't use outdated medicines.