

Tips for using medicines safely



1. Read and follow the directions on the label

Ask your pharmacist to explain new medicine to you. Read the label before taking it. To reduce or avoid side effects, follow any special instructions. If your dose is not working, don't take more, but tell your doctor or pharmacist. Remember – it's okay to ask questions.

2. Keep medicines in the original containers

Your medicine will be in a container labelled with your name, the dose and how often to take them. Leave it in this container. If you find foil packs difficult to open, your pharmacist may pop the tablets into a labelled container. Don't put any pills in another pharmacy bottle or food or drink container yourself – someone may take them not realising what they are.

3. Get your pills packed at your pharmacy

If you are taking a few medicines or can't always remember which to take when, ask your pharmacy to dispense them in a calendar or blister Medico Pack.

4. Check with your pharmacist if your medicines look different

If your medicines look different to your last supply, check with your pharmacist.

5. Check when you buy non-prescription medicines

Check with your pharmacist before buying over-the-counter or complementary medicines. Some have risks and side effects or may interact with your medicine.

6. Check with your pharmacist before you chew, crush, break or open tablets or capsules

If you have problems swallowing medicine, don't chew, crush or break open tablets, pills or capsules unless your pharmacist has told you to do so. Some tablets and capsules don't work properly or may be harmful if they're crushed or opened.

7. Store most medicines in a cool dry place

Keep your medicines at room temperature, unless you have been told otherwise. Keeping medicines in the fridge may destroy them, unless the label says to do so. Don't store in the bathroom as the steam and humidity can stop them working as well as they should.

8. Don't take old medicines or those for someone else

Don't take medicines that were prescribed for someone else, are past their use by date or were prescribed for you months or years ago, even if you have the same condition now.

9. Dispose of unwanted medicines regularly and safely

If you have leftover medicines, take them to your pharmacy for safe disposal. Getting rid of medicines in rubbish bags, bins or down the toilet can cause problems elsewhere.

10. Keep medicines out of reach of children

Keep medicines in a high locked cabinet or place that is hard for children to reach. All medicines can be dangerous. If you think someone has taken a medicine that is not for them, call the [National Poisons Centre](#) on 0800 764 766 or call **111** for an ambulance.

Read more tips for using medicine safely at healthnavigator.org.nz