

Remembering to take your medicine

Remembering to take your medicines regularly and at the correct time isn't always easy.

If you've just been prescribed a medicine, it can take some time to get used to remembering to take it. But equally, if you've been taking medicines for a while, it can become so routine that you may forget whether you took your dose or not. You may confuse thinking about taking your medicine with actually doing it! Here are 10 tips to help you to remember to take each medicine at the right time.

1. Take doses with a daily activity

Make a habit or routine of taking your medicine. Take your doses at the same time as a daily activity such as breakfast, after a shower or when you get ready for bed. Keep your medicines in easy-to-see (but secure) spots as a visual clue. Soon your medicines will become routine, just like brushing your teeth (and that might be a good time to take your medicines, too). If your medicine needs to be stored in the fridge, a sticky note on the fridge door could be a reminder.

2. Mark the calendar

Marking the date on a calendar once you have taken your medicines for that day can be helpful. If you need to take medicines 2 or 3 times a day, you can put a tick or mark the date 2 or 3 times. Marking the calendar may also be useful for medicines that need to be taken at odd times such as once or twice a week or once a month.



3. Make a wall chart

A wall chart can also be helpful to remember to take your medicines. The wall chart should have:

- the name of your medicine
- the dose to be taken
- the time of day you need to take it.

4. Set an alarm

Setting an alarm clock to remind you that your medicines need to be taken at a certain time each day also works well for some people.

5. Use an app

If you have a smartphone or mobile device, there are a number of apps that can send you a reminder to take your medicines and you can record when you have taken your dose. These are called medication adherence apps. Read more about [medication adherence apps](#).



6. Use a pillbox

Pharmacies and supermarkets sell plastic pillboxes. Some are labelled with the days of the week and the times of the day. To help you keep track, fill the pillbox at the beginning of the week. If you are unsure, you can ask a family member or nurse to check that you have filled it correctly.

7. Ask for compliance packaging from your pharmacy

Many pharmacies offer a compliance packaging service where your medicines can be packaged into blister packs or rolls of sachets.

Blister packs

A blister pack has rows of little plastic pockets to keep the capsules or tablets in and has a foil backing. The foil has the medicine name and the dose. The pack has the time, eg, breakfast, lunch, dinner or bedtime, and the day of the week you are to take them. Blister packs are available as weekly or monthly packs – ask your pharmacist which is best for you. With some blister packs you can tear off a strip for a day or a single dose. This is useful for taking on an outing.



Sachet rolls

Some pharmacies also offer sachet rolls, where tablets or capsules are kept in plastic pockets or sachets. The sachet has details of the medicine name, dose amount and time printed on it.

8. Know what to do if you miss a dose

When you start a new medicine, ask your pharmacist what to do if you miss a dose. For most medicines, you can take your next dose at the usual time and at your usual dose. Do not take any more than your doctor prescribed.

However, there are some medicines where a missed dose can be a problem and you should contact your pharmacist for advice on what to do. Examples of these include:

- the [combined oral contraceptive pill](#) and the [mini-pill](#) – if you miss a dose, you may be at risk of becoming pregnant
- [epilepsy medicines](#)
- [warfarin](#)
- [insulin](#)
- [clozapine](#)
- [methotrexate](#) (if taken once weekly)
- medicines for cancer
- medicines to prevent rejection of a transplant.

9. Get advice on your medicine schedule

If you find your medicine schedule is difficult, ask your doctor or pharmacist what to do about it.

10. Have a plan for when you go away

If you change your regular routine, you may forget to take your medicines, eg, if you are on holiday. Make sure that if you are going to be somewhere different, you have a plan or prompt to remind you to take your medicine.

Need more help?

To learn more about medicines, visit www.healthnavigator.org.nz and search for “medicines”.