

# Let's Talk

## Medication Safety

Medication safety  
starts with you,  
the patient



**ISQSH**

International Society for Quality & Safety in Healthcare

**Plain English**

Approved by NALA

## Know your medicines

Medicines are generally safe and effective. However, medicines can cause side effects and mistakes with medication can and do happen.

If you know the **basics** (see p. 4) about your medication, you will be in a better position to notice if something doesn't seem right. If something seems different, do not assume that it is correct; make sure to **ask** a doctor, pharmacist or nurse about it.



## Contents

Using medication safely	3
The basics	4
Understanding your medicines	5
Medicines' names	6
Checklist	7
Following instructions	11
Storing your medicine	13
Medication boxes	14
Going to hospital	15
Questions	17
Coming home from hospital	19
Questions	21
Questions to ask about new medicines	23
Information Sources	27
Medication list	

## Using medication safely can help you to:

- Have a longer, healthier life
- Recover from illness
- Prevent illness
- Prevent trips to hospital



## The basics

To benefit fully from your medicines, you should know the basics about all of them.

1. Why you need the medicine
2. The **name** of your medicine
3. The **dose** or amount of the medicine you need to take
4. How **often** you must take the medicine
5. How **long** you need to take the medicine for
6. The **side effects** of your medicine
7. **Where** and how you store your medicine

## Understanding your medicine

There are different types of medicines:

▶ **Prescription:** Your doctor, dentist or nurse prescriber can prescribe you these medicines after seeing you. A pharmacist will check and fill the prescription for you.

▶ **Over-the-counter:** You can buy these in a supermarket, shop or pharmacy without a prescription. You usually take them if you have a common cold, pain, allergy or minor infection.

▶ **Complementary, herbal, alternative:** These can help you to prevent, manage or relieve illness. Examples are vitamins, minerals or herbal products.

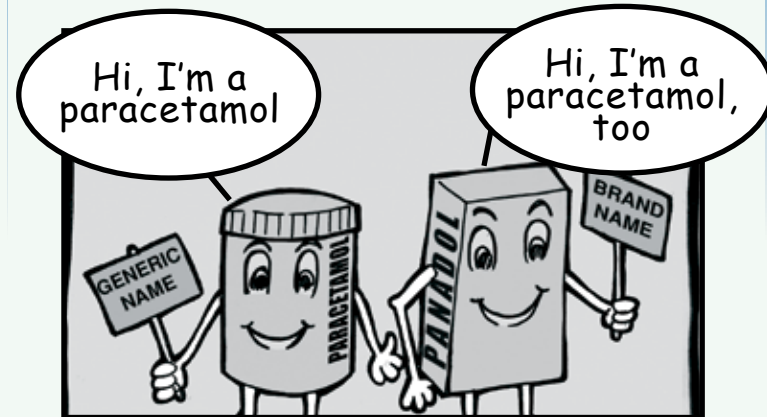
**Remember:** even if you do not need a prescription for all of your medicines, you still have to be careful when using them as **medicines can interact** with each other. They also might not be the best treatment for your illness.

Always report **all** medicines to your doctor or pharmacist.

## Medicines' name

**Brand name:** This is the name the pharmaceutical company gives to a drug they make. The brand name is usually easy to remember and is clearly written on the pack, for example Panadol® and Hedex®. You will also see the generic name of the medicine printed on the pack.

**Generic name:** This is the common name of the medicine. For example Panadol® and Hedex® are the brand names for the generic medicine paracetamol. The generic name is usually in smaller print size and printed below the brand name on the medicine pack.



## Checklist for using medicines safely

- Tell your doctor or pharmacist about all the medicines you are taking.**

**Tip:** Make a list of all your medicines (see foldout form, last page) including over-the-counter, complementary, herbal and alternative medicines. Take this list with you each time you visit your pharmacist or doctor. Ask your doctor or pharmacist to update this list if your medicines change.

- Keep your family doctor up-to-date about all parts of your healthcare.**

It is easier for your GP to spot possible interactions between your medicines if they know about all the medicines you are taking.

- Use the same pharmacy when possible.**

Pharmacists have independent information systems. So if you are going to several pharmacies, they will not have a complete list of your medication.

- Check that you got the correct medicine before you leave the pharmacy.**

**Tip:** Use your medication list to help you check the name and strength of your medicines. Also check that your name is on the label.

- Get your medicines checked regularly.**

**Tip:** Bring all your medicines into the doctor or pharmacist once every six months to a year and show them everything you are taking. This will make sure that your medicines are safe to take together.

- Tell the doctor or pharmacist if you have any problems understanding information about your medicines.**

**Tip:** You can ask a friend, someone from your family or a carer to go to the doctor with you.

- Tell the doctor and pharmacist if you are pregnant or breastfeeding.**

- Always read the patient information leaflet you get with your medicine.**



## Following instructions

Always read the label and follow the instructions of **each** medicine. If you have any problems understanding the instructions, ask your doctor or pharmacist.

This is not a real label. We created this label to show you why instructions are important. Each medicine will have different instructions.

You should store all medicines in a high cabinet that children can't reach. Medicines can often look and taste like sweets.

Follow the instructions printed on the label. Each medicine is different.

Should you take your medicine before, with or after food?

Can you take this medicine safely with alcohol?

Generic name

Brand name

Do you need to store the medicine in a certain way?

Should you do anything before using the medicine?

Patient name

Pharmacy name and contact number in case you have any questions

It is important to follow the instructions and finish the course of medicine, even if you start to feel better.



## Storing your medicine

Every medicine is different, so always read how to store **each** medicine.

▶ Store medicine in a cool, dry place and away from light and according to its instructions. For example sometimes you might have to keep your medicine in the fridge.

▶ Do not store liquid medicine in a freezer unless you are told to.

▶ Do not store medicines in a bathroom or car, as heat and moisture can damage medicine.

▶ Check that your medicine is in-date. Take out-of-date medicines back to your pharmacist so they can destroy them. You should not put them in the bin or toilet.

▶ Check when your medicine expires once you open it.

▶ Store medicines out of the reach of children.

## Medication boxes

Always keep medicines in their original containers unless you are told to keep them somewhere else.

▶ If you have any problems managing all your different medicines, your pharmacist can put your medicines in special containers such as blister packs or dosette boxes.

▶ If you use a dosette box, tell your doctor or pharmacist.





### Did you know?

Evidence shows that people make the most mistakes with their medicines when they have a change in care.

When you go to hospital you will be asked what medications you are taking at home.

The most important thing you can do to ensure medication safety when you go to hospital is to know your medicines.



### Remember:

- ▶ Bring an up-to-date list of the medicines you are currently taking (see foldout form, last page) or bring your medicines with you and show these to the doctor or nurse. If you have to go to hospital in an emergency, someone from your family or a friend could do this for you.
- ▶ Write down the telephone number of your pharmacist and family doctor.
- ▶ Tell the doctor and nurse in hospital about any allergies that you might have to any medicines. You should write any allergies on your medication list.

## Questions to ask in hospital

- Have you stopped any of the medicines I was taking at home since I was admitted? If yes, why?

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- Have you prescribed me any new medicines? If yes, what are these for?

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- How often do I need to take these medicines?

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- What times should I take them, for example before meals, in the morning, at night?

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- What are the side effects of these medicines?

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- Talk to a doctor, nurse or pharmacist if you have any questions or if you feel that something is wrong with your medicines.

## Coming home from hospital

When you leave hospital and go home you need to be careful with your medicines. You are going from a place where someone is supervising your medicines to where you have to manage them yourself.

### Remember:

- ▶ Ask your doctor or pharmacist to explain the medicine plan you will have at home.
- ▶ Go through **all** your medicines and make sure you know the **basics** (see p.4) of all of them.
- ▶ Go to your GP or pharmacist as soon as possible after you leave hospital and show them your new prescription. Ask them to compare it with the prescription you had before you were in hospital. The hospital might have stopped or replaced some of your old medicines.

While you were in hospital you might have been prescribed a different brand of a medicine to the one you had been taking at home. This might lead to confusion about your medicines.

**Note:** If you have any questions do not be afraid to ask the doctor, nurse or pharmacist even if they seem busy. They want you to be safe.

You can help them a lot by knowing about your medicines.

At home you should contact your doctor or pharmacist if:

- you have any questions about your medicines, or
- you become ill in any way.

## Questions to ask when you leave hospital

- What medicines do I need to take at home?

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- Have you changed or replaced any of my medicines?

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- What is the name and number of the doctor who wrote my new prescription?

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- What is the name and number of the ward I was on?

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## Questions to ask about new medicines

- Can I have written instructions for my new medicines?

You should read the instructions and make sure you understand everything. If you don't, ask any questions before you go home or go ask your GP.

- What exactly is each of these medicines for?

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- How long do I have to take each of these for?

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- What are the side effects of these medicines?

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- What should I do if I have these side effects?

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- Are there any medicines, vitamins or herbs that I should not take with these medicines?

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## Questions to ask about new medicines, continued

- Are there any foods, drinks or activities that I should avoid while I'm taking these medicines?

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- Can I drink alcohol while I'm taking these medicines?

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- Can I drive or use machinery while I'm taking these medicines?

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- Do I need to have my bloods monitored when I'm on this medicine?

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- Can you up-date my medication list?

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### Patient Focus

This is a patient advocacy group that aims to support patients and to resolve difficulties when they arise within the healthcare setting.

**Tel:** 01 885 1611 or 01 885 1617

**Web:** [www.patientfocus.ie](http://www.patientfocus.ie)

### Irish Medicines Board

The role of the Irish Medicines Board is to protect and enhance public and animal health through the regulation of medicines, medical devices and healthcare products.

**Tel:** 01 676 4971

**Web:** [www.imb.ie](http://www.imb.ie)

### The Clinical Indemnity Scheme

This scheme is responsible for managing clinical negligence claims and associated risks.

**Tel:** 01 664 0900

**Web:** [www.stateclaims.ie/](http://www.stateclaims.ie/)

[ClinicalIndemnityScheme/introduction.html](http://www.stateclaims.ie/ClinicalIndemnityScheme/introduction.html)

### Websites

**[www.medicines.ie](http://www.medicines.ie)**

You can search for the patient information leaflet of different medicines.

**[www.safemedication.com](http://www.safemedication.com)**

You can find lots of advice and information on the safe use of medicines.

**[www.feelbetter.ie](http://www.feelbetter.ie)**

This offers you a guide to manage minor ailments, which is designed to help you get the best out of your medicines.

**[www.hse.ie/eng/Your\\_Service\\_Your\\_Say](http://www.hse.ie/eng/Your_Service_Your_Say)**

This section of the HSE site invites you to have your say about the services. You can make a comment or a complaint or pay staff a compliment.





**Medication  
safety**

**Always ask,  
“Is my  
medication  
list  
up-dated?”**

**Know the  
basics  
about your  
medicine.**

**Keep an  
up-to-date  
list of all  
your  
medicines.**

**Get  
all your  
medicines  
checked  
regularly.**

**Tell your  
doctor or  
pharmacist if  
you are taking  
over-the-counter,  
complementary,  
alternative  
and herbal  
medicines.**

**Try  
to use  
the same  
community  
pharmacy.**



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