



# how to take medicines safely




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**Medicines can make the quality of our lives better in many ways. They can help cure or treat an illness or disease and can also prevent some conditions from developing in the first place. In this way, medicines can help people live longer and healthier lives.**

The vast majority of us will need to take medicines at some point in time. These may be a prescription only medicine or a medicine that is available over-the-counter.

This leaflet highlights some key points to help you use medicines safely and effectively.



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the quality of our lives  
better in many ways**

**To get the most from your medicine,  
it is important that you use it safely  
and follow the instructions provided**

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### **Over-the-counter medicines**

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These medicines are available without a prescription and are usually for milder conditions and short term use. While some of these products are available on general sale in retail outlets, others can only be purchased in pharmacies. Over-the-counter medicines are usually used for conditions that a patient can treat themselves such as colds and pain relief.

### **Prescription only medicines**

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As these medicines require medical supervision, they are available only with a doctor's or dentist's prescription. They are sold through pharmacies.

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## Before you start using your medicine

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To get the most from your medicine, it is important that you use it safely. Here are some precautions for you to consider before you start taking a medicine.

- Always read the patient information. This will be included on a leaflet or as part of the packaging. Also, carefully read the label on the container or bottle.
- Let your doctor or pharmacist know if you have any problems understanding any information about your medicines.
- Tell your doctor and pharmacist about any other medicines you are taking including herbal medicines. Some medicines can react with each other if taken together, and this could pose a health risk.
- Unless otherwise advised, take your medicine at the same time every day and always complete the recommended course.
- Always tell your doctor or pharmacist if you have any allergies to certain medicines.
- Use the same doctor and the same pharmacy if possible. This will allow both to build a patient history for you.



**If you have any questions or problems understanding information about your medicines, talk to your doctor or pharmacist**

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- Check that you have received the correct medicine before you leave the pharmacy.
- Have the medicines you are taking on a long term basis reviewed by a doctor or pharmacist once a year.
- Tell your doctor or pharmacist if you have scheduled surgery, if you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy or if you are breastfeeding.
- If you are travelling, make sure you carry enough of your medicine with you to take the correct dose while you are away.

## Never take more than the recommended dose of your medicine

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### Taking your medicines

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If you don't take your medicine properly, it may be ineffective and cause more harm than good. Here are some tips to help avoid mistakes.

- Don't take more than the recommended dose. For medicines that have been prescribed for you, the dose will be on the pharmacy label. For medicines you have bought without a prescription, the dose is written on the packet or label and in the package leaflet.
- Don't take two doses if you forget to take your medicine. Check the package leaflet for advice or talk to your doctor or pharmacist.
- Don't stop taking your medicines unless your doctor or pharmacist tells you to do so.
- Don't take a medicine for longer than instructed by your doctor or pharmacist.
- Don't share your medicines with others and never take a medicine that was prescribed for somebody else.
- Don't save a prescription for future use unless your doctor asks you to.
- Never take a non-prescription medicine if you are on other medication without first checking with your pharmacist.



If you don't take your medicine properly, it may be ineffective and cause more harm than good



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- Don't crush pills or open capsules to make them easier to swallow unless advised to do so by your doctor or pharmacist.
  - Don't take a medicine that is out-of-date.
  - Some medicines can interact or can have a reduced effect when used with alcohol. Check with your doctor or pharmacist if you intend to consume alcohol at the same time as taking your medicine.
  - Don't ignore an unexpected side effect that you think may be related to the medicine you have taken. If you have a suspected side effect, contact your doctor or pharmacist immediately.

Always read the **patient information** provided on the leaflet or packaging. It will give you very important information about your medicine including:

- what the medicine is for.
- how to take the medicine and recommended doses.
- information on potential side effects.
- when you should not take the medicine.
- storage and the expiry date.

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## Storing your medicines

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Every medicine is different so always read the storage information provided.

- Store medicines in a cool, dry place away from strong light. Some medicines may need to be stored in a fridge.
- Don't store medicines in a bathroom or car, as heat and moisture can interfere with and damage medicines.
- Always keep medicines in their original containers unless you are advised to store them somewhere else by your doctor.
- Don't mix different medicines in one container.
- Don't destroy or discard unused or out-of-date medicines yourself. Return them to your pharmacist who can destroy them safely.
- Always keep medicines safely out of sight and reach of children.
- Avoid taking medicine in front of children as children often imitate the actions of adults.

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## **The Irish Medicines Board**

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

### **What does the IMB do?**

As the regulatory authority, the IMB monitors the safety of medicines available in Ireland. It aims to ensure that all medicines purchased here are safe, effective and of high quality. The IMB identifies and addresses safety issues so that medicines do not compromise the health of patients.

### **More Information**

This is one in a series of information leaflets that are available from the IMB and from the IMB website, **[www.imb.ie](http://www.imb.ie)**.

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HUMAN MEDICINES



IRISH MEDICINES BOARD

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