

# HPRA



An tÚdarás Rialála Táirgí Sláinte  
Health Products Regulatory Authority

HUMAN MEDICINES

## How to take medicines safely

Our  
advice



## OUR ADVICE ON

# How to take medicines safely

**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 us live longer and healthier lives.**

Nearly all of us will need to take medicines at some point in our lives. These may be:

1. medicines that are only available with a prescription from a doctor, dentist or certain nurses (known as prescription-only medicines); or
2. medicines that you can buy over-the-counter without a prescription (sometimes called OTC medicines).

This leaflet tells you how to use medicines safely and effectively.

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

## Over-the-counter medicines

You can get these medicines without a prescription. They are usually for mild conditions that you can treat yourself such as pain or a cold. You take them for a short time only. You can buy some over-the-counter medicines in shops and supermarkets but for others you will have to go to a pharmacy. Ask your pharmacist if you have any questions about using an over-the-counter medicine.

## Prescription-only medicines

Only doctors, dentists and certain nurses can give you a prescription for these medicines. They are sold through pharmacies.

## Before you start using your medicine

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

- Use the same doctor and the same pharmacy, if possible. This will allow both to build a patient history for you.
- 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 be a health risk.
- Always tell your doctor or pharmacist if you have any allergies to certain medicines.
- Tell your doctor or pharmacist if you have scheduled surgery, if you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy, or if you are breastfeeding.
- Check that you have received the correct medicine before you leave the pharmacy.
- Always read the package leaflet that comes with the medicine. Tell your doctor or pharmacist if you don't understand any information about your medicines.
- Unless your doctor or pharmacist tells you differently, take your medicine at the same time every day and always finish the recommended course.
- If you are travelling, make sure you carry enough of your medicine with you so that you can take the correct dose while you are away.
- If you are taking some medicines for a long time, ask your doctor or pharmacist to review them once a year.

## Generic medicines

Your pharmacist may give you a medicine that comes in a different shape or colour and has a different name. For example, you may be given a generic version of an original, brand-name medicine. A generic medicine has the same active ingredient as the original medicine it is based on. The active ingredient in a medicine is what makes the medicine work.

The generic medicine has the same effect and is just as safe as the original medicine. If you have any questions about generic medicines, ask your doctor or pharmacist. You can also get the leaflet, *Generic Medicines - Our Advice*, from our website: [www.hpra.ie](http://www.hpra.ie).

## Taking your medicines

If you don't take your medicine properly, it may not work and may 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 that comes with the medicine.
- Don't take a medicine that is out of date.
- If you forget to take your medicine, check the package leaflet that came with the medicine for advice or talk to your doctor or pharmacist.
- Don't stop taking your medicines unless your doctor or pharmacist tells you to stop.
- Don't take a medicine for longer than your doctor or pharmacist tells you to.
- Don't share your medicines with other people.

- Don't take a medicine that was prescribed for somebody else.
- Don't save a prescription to use in the future unless your doctor advises you to.
- If you take prescribed medication, never take a non-prescription medicine without first checking with your pharmacist.
- Don't crush pills or open capsules to make them easier to swallow unless your doctor or pharmacist says it is alright to do so.
- Alcohol can interact with some medicines or reduce their effect. Check with your doctor or pharmacist if it is alright for you to drink alcohol while you are on medication.
- Don't take medicine in front of children as they often copy what they see adults doing.
- Don't ignore an unexpected side effect that you think may be related to the medicine you have taken. Contact your doctor or pharmacist immediately.

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

- what the medicine is for;
- how to take the medicine and the recommended dose;
- possible side effects;
- when you should not take the medicine;
- storage and expiry date.

### Storing your medicines

Every medicine is different so always read the storage instructions on the leaflet or packaging.

- Store medicines in a cool, dry place away from strong light. You may need to store some medicines 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 your doctor advises you to store them somewhere else.
- Don't mix different medicines in one container.
- Don't destroy or throw out 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.

## The Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA)

Our role is to protect and enhance public and animal health by regulating medicines, medical devices and other health products.

### What does the HPRA do?

As the regulatory authority, we monitor the safety and quality of medicines available in Ireland. Our aim is to make sure that medicines are as safe as possible and do what they are intended to do.

### More information

This is one in a series of information leaflets that you can get from the HPRA and from our website: [www.hpra.ie](http://www.hpra.ie).



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