

# TALKING WITH YOUR DOCTOR

**T**alking with your doctor is the first step to managing medications. Fifty percent of the American population over age 60 takes more than three medications a day. As you grow older, your likelihood of taking additional medications increases. Whether you take one medication or 10, it is important to develop the habit of asking the same questions and having the same discussion with your health care professional about each one.

For those managing multiple medications, it is likely that the medications are prescribed by more than one doctor (think about your primary care physician and any additional specialists

## Key Resources:

National Council on Patient Information and Education:  
[www.talkaboutrx.org](http://www.talkaboutrx.org)

you see). Any one of your health care professionals may not be aware of the other prescriptions you are taking. As a patient, it is your right and responsibility to schedule time with someone from your health care team to review all of your medications. If your

primary physician, specialist or physician's assistant does not have time during a routine check-up to review your medications, let your doctor's office know that you would like to conduct a medication review on your next visit and to schedule extra time. Often these are called 'brown-bag' visits because you are encouraged to gather and bring all of your medications to the appointment.

**During your brown-bag visit you can gain a better understanding about what each medication does and why you are taking it (they are not always the same thing).** Your doctor can give detailed instructions about how to take the medication so it is most effective. Together you and your doctor can assess if the prescription is necessary, in comparison with any other medication you are taking. You will avoid taking a duplicate medication and reduce potential for harmful interactions. Also you will learn whether there is something else you can do, either in addition to taking the drug or instead of taking it, which will improve your health (i.e. exercising, eating healthier). Finally, you can discover whether taking a generic equivalent would provide a better value (see the section *Generics: Dispelling the Myths*).

There are a few standard questions you should ask your doctor about each of your prescriptions. You can use a simple Medication Review Form (included in this guide) to help guide you through and record answers to all of these questions:

- Why do I take this prescription?
- What condition is this drug intended to treat?
- How do I take this medication (how often, with/without food, etc.)?
- Is it for long- or short-term use?
- What are the side effects? What should I do if they occur?
- What should I do if I miss a dose?
- Can I substitute a non-drug alternative or generic?
- Does it duplicate any of the other prescriptions I am taking?
- Does this drug interact with any of the other prescriptions I take?
- How important is this prescription given my finances and overall health?
- Does my health or age make this drug unsafe for me?

### **Side Effects and What to Do**

When taking medications, it is important to consult your doctor about your side effects. Contact your doctor immediately if you are experiencing serious side effects such as:

- ▶ signs of memory loss;
- ▶ agitation or irritability;
- ▶ loss of coordination.

Remember, it is not always safe to quite taking a medicine cold turkey; be able to provide your doctor with detail about any side effects you are experiencing. This may result in taking a lower dose, changing when you take the prescription or taking a different medication all together.

### **Handouts:**

- ▶ Multiple Medications
- ▶ Medication Review Form

Get into the habit of asking your doctor these questions each time you receive a new prescription and add additional pages to your medication review form as needed. If you receive prescriptions from more than one doctor, always take your record with you and speak up about which medications you are currently taking.

## Summary

Studies show that the more medications an individual takes, the more likely that they will be prescribed a medication they do not absolutely need. It is important to manage your prescriptions to reduce your risk of drug interactions. Update your Medication Review Form whenever you are no longer taking a certain prescription and be sure to note any side effects you observe. By discussing observations, you and your doctor can work together to devise the best possible plan.

### Don't Leave it Behind!

In addition to bringing all of your medications, do not forget to include in your brown-bag:

- ▶ Any over-the-counter medications, herbal or vitamin supplements you are currently taking.
- ▶ Any prescriptions you have not filled yet or do not take on a regular basis—do not be shy, explain to the doctor why you have not taken the prescription or gotten it filled. It is their job to make your prescriptions manageable.
- ▶ Any research you have done. Go to [www.CRBestBuyDrugs.org](http://www.CRBestBuyDrugs.org) to download simple reports featuring comparisons of individual drug classes.
- ▶ An alternative—you can call your prescription drug insurance company or pharmacy. They will send a list of all of your medications for the past year.