

# Strategies for Managing Your Medications

This guide offers some strategies that can help you with your medication use. If any issue applies to you, talk to your health care provider (HCP) about using one or more of the suggested strategies. HCP includes physicians, nurses, physician assistants, dentists, social workers, psychiatrists, pharmacists and anyone else you may visit to seek health care.

Issue	Strategies
1. Problem taking a medication as instructed because of changes in its color, size or shape.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ask the pharmacist to always alert you to any changes in the brand of medication received.</li><li>• Ask the pharmacist to show you the new medication.</li><li>• For mail order prescriptions, call the telephone number on the medication label and ask about the changes.</li></ul>
2. Problem taking a medication as instructed because of changes in normal routine. (Examples: travel, caring for others or illness)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consider using a calendar, pill box, or a reminder system on your cell phone.</li><li>• Ask your HCP how to take specific medications when there is a change in routine or you are ill.</li></ul>
3. Problem taking a medication as instructed because the directions are too complicated.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ask your HCP or pharmacist to provide the instructions in a simpler fashion.</li><li>• Review instructions with your HCP or pharmacist.</li><li>• Call your HCP, pharmacist, or mail order pharmacy to clarify the instructions.</li><li>• Ask your HCP if there is a way to make your medication schedule less complicated.</li></ul>

## Issue

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| <p>4. Problem getting prescriptions on time because of hassles. (Examples: long waits at the pharmacy, problems with mail order, not being able to reach your doctor to get a refill, bad weather or no transportation)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Talk to the pharmacist about a different way of getting the medications.</li><li>• Create an alert on your cellphone or calendar to allow enough time to request a refill.</li><li>• Sign up for an automatic refill alert from the pharmacy.</li><li>• Develop a backup plan for when you can't get to the pharmacy.</li></ul>   |
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| <p>5. Problem taking a medication as instructed because it is difficult to read or hear the instructions.</p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review instructions with the pharmacist or your HCP.</li><li>• Ask for instructions in big print.</li></ul>   |
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| <p>6. Problem taking a medication as instructed because physical difficulties make it hard to take it. (Examples: swallowing a pill, opening a container, measuring a dose or using eye drops)</p>                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Talk with your HCP about other forms of the medication.</li><li>• Ask the pharmacist about different container options.</li><li>• Ask others to help with administration.</li><li>• Ask your HCP or pharmacist about aids or devices that might help you with your medications.</li></ul>   |
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| <p>7. Problem taking medications as instructed because there is not an organized way to keep track of them.</p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ask your HCP or pharmacist about options for keeping track of medications (pill box, bubble pack, calendar, cell phone alerts, etc.).</li><li>• Ask someone to help you set up and manage a medication system.</li><li>• Keep an up to date list of all your prescriptions, over the counter medications and alternative products and share it with all of your HCPs and pharmacists.</li></ul> |
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| <p>8. Problem taking a medication as instructed because help is needed and it isn't available.</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Talk with someone who might be able to help about a schedule that works for both of you.</li><li>• Explore options for getting help with your HCP or social service provider.</li></ul>   |
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9. Take less of a medication than instructed or skip it because of the side effects.

- Tell your HCP about any side effects or unexpected symptoms that worry you.
- Ask your HCP if there are other medication options.
- Ask your HCP how to manage the side effects.

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10. Take less of a medication than instructed or skip it because its effects restrict daily activities. (Examples: needing to go to the bathroom too often, feeling tired or not being able to think clearly.)

- Ask your HCP or pharmacist if the medication can be taken at a more convenient time.
- Ask your HCP if there are other medications that you could use that would not restrict daily activities.

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11. Take less of a medication than instructed or skip it to try to save money.

- Ask your HCP or pharmacist about resources to help with medication expenses.
- Ask your HCP if there are generic options.
- Visit the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (N4A) at [www.n4a.org](http://www.n4a.org) to find your local Area Agency on Aging for information about medication resources.
- Visit the National Eldercare locator at [www.eldercare.gov](http://www.eldercare.gov) or call them at 1-800-677-1116 for information on financial resources.

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12. Take less of a medication than instructed or skip it because of worry about how the medications might interact with each other.

- Ask your HCP or pharmacist about possible medication interactions.
  - Tell your HCP about any unusual symptoms you are experiencing and ask about possible medication interactions.
  - If you go to more than one pharmacy, inform the pharmacist of all the medications you are taking.
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13. Take less of a medication than instructed or skip it because of the way it needs to be taken. (Examples: injections or eye drops)

- Ask your HCP or pharmacist if there are other ways the medication can be taken.
- Ask others for help using the medication.

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14. Take less of a medication than instructed or skip it because it doesn't seem like it is needed.

- Ask your HCP or pharmacist why the medication has been prescribed.
- Ask your HCP or pharmacist how the medication works.
- Ask your HCP or pharmacist about the consequences of taking less or skipping the medication.

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15. Take less of a medication than instructed or skip it because it seems like the medication is not working.

- Tell your HCP why you think the medication is not working.
- Ask your HCP or pharmacist how the medication works.
- Ask your HCP or pharmacist about the consequences of taking less or skipping the medication.

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16. Take less of a medication than instructed or skip it because of a fear of becoming addicted.

- Talk with your HCP or pharmacist about your concern with becoming addicted.
  - Talk with your HCP about substitute medications.
  - Ask your HCP about other ways to manage symptoms that could minimize the use of the medication.
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17. Forget to take a medication.

- Talk with your HCP or pharmacist about organizational systems to keep track of medications (medication boxes, bubble packs, using a calendar, creating an alert on cell phone, etc.).
- Ask others to help you set up and manage a medication system or reminder system.
- Ask your HCP if the medication schedule can be simplified.

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18. Take over the counter medications, supplements or alternative products without knowing how they interact with prescriptions.

- Talk with the pharmacist about prescription and over the counter medications, supplements, and alternative products to learn about possible interactions.
- Read the information sheet that comes with your medication to learn about interactions.
- Keep an up to date list of all your prescriptions, over the counter medications and alternative products and share the list with all of your HCPs and pharmacists.

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19. Take alternative products instead of a medication that your HCP prescribed or recommended.

- Tell your HCP about alternative products you use and why you use them.

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20. Decide on own what medication to take.

- Keep your HCP informed about how you manage your illnesses or symptoms.
- Tell your HCP if your symptoms don't respond to the medication you are taking.

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21. Take more of a medication than instructed to get more relief from symptoms.

- Talk with your HCP about symptoms that don't go away.
  - Ask your HCP for other options to get more relief from symptoms.
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22. Drink alcoholic beverages when the instructions for a medication said not to use alcohol.

- Talk with the pharmacist or your HCP about your use of alcohol with the medication.
- Seek help from your HCP if you have difficulty giving up alcohol.

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23. Take a pain reliever, tranquilizer, anxiety medication, or sleep aid when it really isn't needed.

- Talk with your HCP about the medications you are using and why.
- Tell your HCP if you think you need to talk with someone about using medications in this way.

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24. Go to more than one HCP because you need or want more of a medication than prescribed.

- Tell your HCP about your need for more medication.
- Tell your HCP if you think you need to talk to someone about your use of these medications.