

Medicines Safety Handbook

A guide for patients and carers





keeping tabs on your medicines

Do you or someone you care for need help managing medicines? Then speak to us about MyMed.



MyMed helps you make sure the **right** medication is taken at the **right** time, **every** time.

Your medicine is dispensed into handy weekly packs, where each of your tablets is in a separate compartment depending on the time of day you need to take it. Simply peel the seal, and the work is done.

Do you:

- Take a lot of medicines?
- Worry about missing a dose?
- Care for someone who takes multiple medicines?
- Find it difficult bringing your medicines on holiday?

The MyMed weekly dosage system is unique to Unicarepharmacy and DocMorris Pharmacy and has been designed by us in consultation with Age Action, Comfort Keepers and the Carers Association.

This service is available to all our patients. Ask your pharmacist or doctor about having your medicines delivered in a MyMed weekly dosage pack.

Introduction

Medicines are powerful substances that are used to treat or prevent disease and therefore must be treated with respect and handled carefully.

This informational booklet has been adapted from the Lloyds Pharmacy 'Handling Medicines in Domiciliary Care' distance learning course, designed for carers working in the UK. It is intended to serve as a guide on the correct way to handle prescription medicines for patients and carers.

Medicines Categories

There are 4 main categories of medicines.

1. Prescription Only Medicines (POM)

These medicines can only be supplied against a prescription written by a doctor or dentist. An example is an inhaler for asthma.

2. Pharmacy Medicines (P)

A 'P' medicine can only be sold from a registered pharmacy under the direct supervision of a pharmacist. Whilst not requiring a prescription, P medicines are often high strength and can only be provided by a pharmacist. Examples include Solpadeine and Nurofen.

3. General Sales List Medicines (GSL)

These are medicines which can be sold from many retail outlets including corner shops and supermarkets. Examples include small quantities of some indigestion remedies and pain killers, such as Panadol Tablets or Lemsip Sachets.

4. Controlled Drugs (CD)

These are a group of drugs regulated by the Misuse of Drugs Act. They are generally more potent in their action and/or more open to abuse.

Medicines Categories continued

In addition to the four categories of medicines described, there are other medicines that are known as 'complimentary medicines', 'herbal medicines' and 'homeopathic medicines'.

These medicines are sometimes generally referred to as 'herbal', however inaccurate this description may actually be. Many of these medicines can be bought from pharmacies and health food shops. These medicines or remedies are not regulated in the same way as the categories listed above, but they should be treated in the same way as other medications in terms of patient safety and storage.

It is extremely important to check with either a GP or Pharmacist regarding the safety of taking these medicines with prescription medication as some adverse interactions may be possible.

Important Note:

It is important to remember that a POM (Prescription Only Medicine) is prescribed for an individual and remains the property of that individual. Under no circumstances should this medicine be given to or used by anyone else other than the patient for whom it was prescribed

Patient Information Pack (PIP)

Available at all Unicarepharmacy and DocMorris Pharmacies, a PIP provides you with a means of storing important personal and medical information in case of an emergency. Your PIP should be completed with all relevant information and stored in your fridge at home. You will also receive a PIP keyring and sticker for your home so emergency personnel can identify you as having a pack.



Age Action
IRELAND
For All Older People

**PIPs cost just €2 and
all proceeds go to Age
Action Ireland.**

Sources of Information

There may be times when you need to find out more information about certain medicines that you are dealing with, either to explain a side-effect, to check the correct dosage time, or to check compatibility with other medicines. Whatever it is, there are several ways in which you can find out what you need to know:

1. Your Community Pharmacist

The pharmacist in your local pharmacy is ideally placed to answer any questions you have about medicines. They can offer advice about the actions and side-effects of any medications they dispense. They can also advise about interactions with other medicines or over-the-counter preparations.

Your local pharmacist can also advise you about what other forms of medicines may be available if a patient is having difficulty swallowing perhaps. Or they can recommend treatment for minor ailments, such as coughs and colds, which may not necessarily warrant a visit from the doctor.

2. The Patient Information Leaflet (PIL)

The PIL is a document produced by a medicine's manufacturer outlining all important details about a medicine. A medicine's PIL is usually enclosed at every dispensing and contains information about dosage, side-effects, interactions, etc.

It is important to remember that if there is any concern about information on a PIL (e.g. if it states a different dosage from the one prescribed), you should contact either your local pharmacist or the prescribing doctor before you make any changes in administration of the medicine.

PILs may not be included if medicines are dispensed into a weekly dosage system, such as MyMed. However, if you wish to obtain one, simply contact the dispensing pharmacy who will send you out an extra copy.

In certain instances, the healthcare professional (usually the doctor) who prescribed a medicine may need to be contacted if the pharmacist is unable to help.

Sources of Information continued

3. Written Reference Materials

Your local pharmacy will be happy to consult the medicines manuals that are used in Irish pharmacies on your behalf. The main sources of reference are:

- Mims Ireland, or the Monthly Index of Medical Specialities Ireland
- The British National Formulary (BNF)

These publications contain information on all medicines dispensed in Ireland; ingredients, uses, interactions, side-effects, etc.

4. Websites

The following are useful websites for finding out more information about medicines. There are masses of other sites available but readers can become easily confused with the medical jargon and scientific language. The sites below are easy to use and easy to understand:

- www.medicines.ie Search items by Product Name, e.g. Lipitor
- www.imt.ie/mims The Mims Ireland online resource. Click on the drug name in the Tag Cloud on the left for more information

Important Note:

You should take great care in ensuring that any medicines information you access is accurate, and sticking to those listed above will help with this. Newspapers and websites often publish information about medicines that is misleading or incorrect. When in doubt, contact your local pharmacist.

Ordering your Medicines

- Prescriptions must be supplied to the pharmacy in good time to allow for dispensing medicines. It is vital that timings are planned so that the prescription is ready for collection by a patient or carer or for delivery to a patient's home, before the previous month's medication has run out.
- Many pharmacies offer prescription collection from local surgeries. Similarly, delivery services may also be available according to the physical abilities of the patient. Contact your local pharmacy for more information.
- In most cases, it is advisable to leave prescriptions on file in your local pharmacy. The pharmacy should be contacted at least 2 days before the next month's medicine is required so patients do not run out of any medication.



Storing Medicines



The following points should be considered when storing prescription medicines at home.

- Medicines should be stored at a room temperature which does not exceed 25°C. They should not be kept in bathrooms or kitchens where the temperature is very variable and where there may also be heavy condensation. They should not be stored in direct sunlight or above a fireplace.
- Ideally they should be kept in a cool dark area such as inside a cupboard or drawer. They should be stored where they are not readily available to children who may visit the house.
- The storage point should be known by any carers and/or responsible family members who visit the patient's home.
- Items which need to be stored in a fridge should ideally be placed inside a separate labelled plastic container to ensure there can be no cross-contamination with food in the fridge.

Altering the form of Medication

All tablets and capsules must be administered in their original form. **Under no circumstances must they be crushed, disguised, or capsules opened** unless specifically instructed to do so by the prescribing GP.

Should you be concerned about swallowing difficulties, speak to your pharmacist as it may be possible for the GP to prescribe an alternative form of the medicine (e.g. a liquid).

Why is it important you do not alter the form of medication?

- Crushing or diluting a medicine can change how it works when it enters the body.
- In modified or sustained release medicines (explained later on page 14), altering the form may result in dangerous variations of medication levels within the body.
- The effectiveness of the medication may be disrupted. A quantity may be lost thus causing discrepancies in the amount and strength required by the patient.
- Product licenses do not cover altering the form of medicines. In effect, you will be taking or administering an unlicensed product.



Understanding Label Instructions

It is a legal requirement that medicine labels clearly provide the following information:

- The patient's name
- The name and strength of the dispensed medicine (e.g. Zimovane 7.5mg)
- The amount of dispensed medicine (e.g. 28 tablet, 50ml liquid)
- Directions for use (e.g. one tablet at night)
- The date the medicine was dispensed
- The name and address of the dispensing pharmacy
- The words "Keep out of the reach of children"
- "For external use only" where applicable (e.g. creams, ointments)
- Warnings specific to the medication (e.g. Zimovane - causes drowsiness...as per label)

All of this information must be shown regardless of the type of packaging used to contain the medicine. It is important that a patient or carer is aware of the correct time to

administer the medicines if the instruction is not specific (e.g. "Take one tablet every day"). The actual time may depend upon the type of medicine (e.g. a sleeping tablet would be taken at night).

Please consult your pharmacist if you are unsure of what time of day a medicine needs to be taken. Using a monitored dosage system, such as MyMed, can help to ensure that medication is taken at the correct time of day.

Important Note

Dosage instructions such as "Take as Directed" are not appropriate and ideally should never appear as a dosage instruction. You should never guess at the instruction. If a patient or carer has any uncertainty about the interpretation of a dosage instruction, they should contact the pharmacy who will be able to clarify how to administer the medicine.

Taking your Medicine

When taking medication, or assisting someone else with their medicines there are five simple checks that should be carried out:

Right person - Check that the person about to receive the medication is the correct person.

Right drug - Check that you have the correct medicine. Are all full details available and correct? Do you fully understand all label instructions?

Right dose - Check that you have the correct number of tablets required. If it is a liquid use a proper measuring spoon to ensure the correct amount.

Right time - Make sure you are giving the medication at the correct time.

Right route - Make sure you are using the correct route of administration. No suppositories by mouth!

Following these “5 R’s” will ensure you always take or administer medication correctly.



Taking your Medicine continued

The patient or carer should be aware of what the medicine is intended to do, for example a sleeping tablet obviously induces sleep, and any side effects it may have, for example may cause blurred vision. Refer to the medicine label instruction and the PIL information, or speak to your pharmacist.



ADMINISTRATION PROCESS

All medicines should be taken directly from the container they are received in from the pharmacy. This could be a tablet bottle, a carton or a monitored dosage system. Medicines should not be taken out of any of these containers and stored anywhere else.

All medicines (including creams, inhalers, eye drops, liquids, etc.) must have a printed label on their container containing the following information:

- Patient's Name
- Date of dispensing

- Name and Strength of the medicine, e.g. Brufen 200mg tablets
- Dose and frequency of the medicine, e.g. One to be taken twice daily

Important Note

If a patient is using a Monitored Dosage System, the printed labels should be attached to the cover of the box.

Medicines Administration - The Routes

The table below lists the various ways in which medication can be taken or administered:

Route of Administration	What does this mean?	Examples
Oral	By mouth	Tablets, capsules, liquids
Inhalation	Into the lungs via the mouth	Inhalers to treat asthma
Nasal Inhalation	Into the nose	Nasal sprays to treat hay fever
Topical	Onto the skin, eyes, ears, nose	Creams, ointments, eye drops, ear drops, nose drops
Transdermal	Through the skin	Patches for giving up smoking
*Rectal	Into the bottom	Suppositories to treat acute pain
*Vaginal	Into the vagina	Pessaries to treat internal thrush
*Parenteral	Injections into the muscle, blood or just under the skin	Insulin to treat diabetes

***Important:** Specialist training is required in order for a carer to be qualified to administer medicines in these ways.

We will now look at the process for the more common routes of administration.

Oral Route

Medicines taken by mouth.

This is the most common route of administration. The common formulations are tablets, capsules and liquids. These are swallowed and once in the stomach are broken down by the digestive juices and enter the blood stream from the intestine.

- Check that the patient name on the medication is correct.
- The patient should either be standing or sitting in an upright position to prevent the medication sticking in the oesophagus, unless otherwise directed on the label.
- Check the medication has not exceeded its expiry date.
- The medicine should be swallowed with a good draught of water, **not juice or hot drinks as this may damage the medication or cause a chemical reaction.**

If the medication is an oral liquid, complete steps 1-4 as above and then:

- Look at the measure on a flat surface at eye level and make sure that the front and back graduations are lined up

- Take the bottle, hold it with the label facing upwards (so it pours away from the label and does not obscure) and pour into the centre of the measure
- The lowest part of the liquid's surface should be in line with the graduation mark

As well as standard tablets, capsules and liquids, there are some special formulations of oral medicines:

- Soluble tablets – dissolve in water.
- Enteric coated – special coating to protect the stomach from the drug after it is swallowed.
- Sub-lingual – these are not swallowed. They are placed under the tongue where they dissolve and enter the bloodstream.
- Sustained Release (SR) – Tablets which dissolve slowly over a period of time after being swallowed.
- Buccal tablets – placed between the gum and the inside of the cheek where left and allowed to dissolve.

Inhalation

Using an inhaler

- Check that the patient name on the medication is correct.
- Check the medication has not exceeded its expiry date
- Shake the inhaler well
- The patient should breathe out thoroughly
- Place the mouth piece between the lips
- Inhale slowly
- Press down and spray one dose into the mouth
- The patient should continue to breathe in until their lungs are full and then hold for a count of 10
- Breathe out
- Wait for 1 minute before inhaling the next puff
- Replace the cap
- If the inhaler is a steroid inhaler it is always advisable for the patient to rinse their mouth out with water to prevent infections.



Topical Administration

These include creams, ointments, eye drops, ear drops, nose drops. They are used to treat localised conditions. Before commencing topical administration, always check:

- That the patient name on the medication is correct
- The medication has not exceeded its expiry date

Then, follow the steps below for specific formulations:

Eye Drops or Eye Ointment

- Wash your hands
- Tilt the head backwards and pull down the lower eye lid
- Put the prescribed number of drops or amount of ointment inside the lower lid without touching the eye
- Close the eyes
- Wipe away any excess with a clean tissue
- Replace the cap and store in a cool place
- Discard after four weeks of opening as medication will no longer be sterile.

Nasal Drops

- Gently blow the nose
- The patient should remain seated
- Tilt the head backwards
- Put the correct number of drops into each nostril
- Keep the head tilted back for 2 minutes
- Replace the cap and store in a cool dry place
- Discard after four weeks of opening.

Creams and Ointments

- Wash your hands and apply disposable gloves
- Apply to the affected area following the instructions very carefully
- Replace cap or lid
- Remove gloves & wash hands

Creams and ointments should be applied exactly as directed on the pharmacy label. Excessive use of certain creams or ointments can be dangerous.

Transdermal

Applying Transdermal Patches

- Check that the patient name of the medication is correct
- Check the medication has not exceeded its expiry date
- Remove the old patch from the skin and dispose of safely
- Remove the new patch from the pouch, taking care not to tear the patch. You should do this with your fingers rather than using scissors to avoid damaging the patch
- Pull off the adhesive backing. Do not touch the sticky surface of the patch
- Apply the patch firmly with the sticky side down to a clean, dry, non-hairy area of skin, or the area of the body specified in the instructions. You should apply the new patch to a slightly different area of skin than that used for the previous patch to prevent irritation
- You must not apply a patch to broken or irritated skin
- Run your finger along the edge of the patch to ensure that it is fully sealed to the skin so that no air or water can get in.

Note

These are general instructions for applying skin patches. It is essential that you read the written product information provided.



'When Required' Medication

'When Required' medicines are most referred to as 'PRN' medicines. These medicines are taken only when a patient needs them, for example a pain killer for headache. The instruction on the label may be to take one or two tablets as required.

It is important that the patient or carer is aware what the 'when required' medicine is used for so it is clear when it should be taken.

If a patient is using a monitored dosage system, such as MyMed, these 'when required' medicines will not be included in the weekly pack but in a separate container.

Non Prescribed Medicines

There are many medicines available from pharmacies and other retail outlets which may be required by a patient to treat minor ailments such as headaches, indigestion, coughs or colds. Some of these 'over-the-counter' remedies, although available for sale without prescription, may interact with medicines a patient is already taking.

Anyone taking regular prescription medication must be cautious when considering addition non-prescribed treatments. Most pharmacy assistants will be able to advise you on the appropriate treatment for minor ailments. You should provide all relevant information about any medical conditions, medication taken and symptoms to ensure you receive the appropriate advice.

You should always consult your GP or pharmacist before deciding to take non-prescribed medicines.

Important Note

When taking "When Required" or non prescribed medicines, always ensure you adhere to the maximum dosage instructions displayed on the label or packaging.

Adverse Drug Reactions (side effects)

An Adverse Drug Reaction (ADR), or side effect, is best described as an effect that a medicine has on the body which is of no benefit and was not intended. An example might be stomach bleeding with anti-inflammatory tablets. This would be an ADR/side effect as it is clearly not of benefit and certainly not intended.

Adverse drug reactions are divided into Type A and Type B:

- A Type A reaction is one that occurs due to a known effect and is often predictable. For example feeling drowsy with antihistamine tablets or a dry mouth after taking anti-depressant tablets.
- A Type B reaction is one that is rare and unpredictable. This may be a very serious reaction. An example would be a severe allergic reaction (known as anaphylaxis) to penicillin.

Below is a table showing possible adverse effects for some common medicines. For further information, consult the relevant Patient Information Leaflet or speak to your pharmacist.

Medicine	Used for	Possible Adverse Effect
Ibuprofen	Pain & Inflammation	Stomach Bleeding
Aspirin	Pain & Inflammation	Stomach Bleeding
Cimetidine	Stomach Ulcers	Diarrhoea
Codeine	Pain	Constipation
Salbutamol	Asthma	Tremor in the hands
Penicillin	Antibiotic	Skin Rash
Erythromycin	Antibiotic	Nausea
Amitriptyline	Antidepressant	Dry Mouth
Enalapril	Blood Pressure	Cough
Glyceryl Trinitrate	Angina	Headache
Diazepam	Anxiety	Drowsiness

For a printed copy of this handbook, please call into your local
Unicarepharmacy or DocMorris Pharmacy.

Visit www.unicarepharmacy.ie/mymed for more information.