



# Things to Think About!



By Brandan Atkin

Need help paying for your medications? If you're taking a brand-name drug regularly, check the drug maker's website to see if discounts or coupons are offered.

Another great resource to check out is [www.GoodRx.com](http://www.GoodRx.com)

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## Medications: What to Ask and What We Need to Know

By Linda Jorgensen

At some point in our lives every one of us is going to need to take an over-the-counter medication for, among other things, a headache, heartburn or allergies. We may also be prescribed medication by a physician to take for a specific reason, such as an antibiotic for an infection that will require a prescription and a visit to the local pharmacy. These short term single episode treatments are easy to manage if we take the medication as directed (we read the label directions) and we know what to look for in possible side effects.

One time treatments are pretty simple to manage. But what happens when you're dealing with a chronic condition or a medically fragile child that requires multiple medications over a long period of time? Educating yourself about the medicines your child is taking, the side effects, possible effects and expected outcome are all part of the process of giving medications. The first step begins in the doctor's office.

- Begin by giving the doctor a list of all medications and their dosages your child is taking. Include medication pumps, eye drops, vitamins and minerals, and any other herbal supplements.
- Tell the doctor of any other treatments being used. Sometimes two or more treatments can keep a new treatment from working and some combinations can be fatal. When an individual starts taking more than one medication they begin building a "cocktail" that if not monitored can be deadly. Let your doctor know what medications your child is on.
- Allergies! Be sure to let your doctor know about any allergies your child has. This includes food allergies as well.

Once your doctor has this information you can discuss any new medications being prescribed. Be sure to ask:

- Why a new medication is needed and how is it meant to help your child's current condition?
- Ask how long it will take for the medication to start working.
- Find out the possible side effects. Which side effects should go away with time and which ones will warrant a call to the doctor's office.
- Ask if the drug could react with other medicines your child is taking, what side effects to watch for with the new combination, and what you should do if there is a problem.

- Ask if there needs to be a change in diet (some medicines cannot be given with certain foods), a change in exercise (will this make my child sleepy, dizzy, or lower blood pressure?), or other things that should be done.
- If more than one medication is needed ask if they can be given at the same time or if they need to be taken at a separate time on their own. If a medicine needs to be given during the night ask about another choice or if there is a change in regimen that would allow the medicine to be given late in the evening or early in the morning, instead.
- To keep costs down ask if a generic drug will work instead of a costlier name brand.
- Be sure a generic drug will not have an adverse effect on your child's condition.
- Can a lower dose be prescribed without bad effects?
- Ask if you can buy a one-week supply of the new medication for your child to try so you can observe for side effects. Or ask if the physician has free samples you could take to try.

The second step is to have a chat with your insurance provider. Some prescriptions require a preauthorization from your insurance company or are not covered at all so be sure to contact your insurance company to make sure you know what you will be paying for the new medication. You may find yourself doing a little shopping around to see which drug store has the better price on the medication prescribed.

- Find out if the drug is covered by your insurance policy. Will they pay for it? Does the drug require a preauthorization letter for consideration, first?
- If the drug is not covered will the doctor be called to approve a switch to another drug?
- Find out if a generic drug can be prescribed instead. Or an over-the-counter substitute? (Note: Over-the-counter dosages often differentiate from prescribed medicines so double check the dosage needed with your pharmacist and physician.)
- If the drug is on the covered drug list find out what the highest allowable charge would be for that drug.

The third step is having a chat with your pharmacist. Over time a good pharmacist will become acquainted with the condition of the individual being treated which will make it easier for them to advise you about problems that may come up.

- Ask again about side effects of the medication regardless if it's prescription or generic and when the doctor should be called about them.
- Ask about possible drug interactions with medications your child is already taking.
- Find out the risks of not finishing the prescription.
- Ask what the signs of an overdose are and what emergency actions would need to be taken, just in case.
- Ask if the medication must be taken on an empty stomach, with water, milk, or a meal.
- Ask how the medication must be given. There are many ways medicines are absorbed by the body. Be sure you know which one you'll be using. Swallowed? On the skin as a topical application? Liquid through a G-tube? \*Never crush medicines without talking to the doctor or pharmacist. Or both. If there is a swallowing problem there may be another way to solve it.
- Be sure BEFORE you leave the pharmacy that you understand the time of day, the dose to be given and how to give it. If you have further questions, ask the pharmacist until you are satisfied you know what you need to know. If you STILL have questions or need more help, you can call the nurses at your child's physician's office.

Arm yourself with all the information you need and you'll be better prepared to handle any situation that may arise.

#### **\*\* Useful abbreviations often found on medication bottles**

- HS**~ Hour of Sleep (give this medication at bed time)
- BID**~ Twice a Day (give this medication 2 times per day. Approximately 8am and 8pm)
- TID**~ Three Times a Day (give this medicine 3 times per day. Approximately 7am, 3pm and 11pm)
- QID**~ Four Times a Day (give this medicine 4 times a day. Approximately 7am, 1pm, 7pm, 1am)
- PRN**~ As Needed (Be sure to follow the direction on the label for times between doses and how this medication should be given)