

Make the List!

A medication list can save your life. How? This list can:

- prevent drug interactions and medication duplications.
- remind prescribers to stop medicines that are no longer needed.
- provide others with necessary information to give you proper care.

Have you ever heard someone say they felt better when a doctor stopped their medications? Regular review of their medication list by a doctor or pharmacist might have spared them from suffering.

Sometimes people see their doctor for symptoms they think might be a new health problem. A medication list can alert the doctor if those symptoms are really side effects. The doctor can then stop a medication rather than add a new one.

If you get prescriptions through Medicare Part D, preparing a medication list is the first step in choosing a prescription plan. The list makes it easy for pharmacists and others to identify the plans to cover your medicines.

Medication lists are also great conversation starters with doctors and pharmacists. Go over the list with them to make sure that you and your health provider talk about all your medicines and health concerns.

Follow these simple steps to set up your medication list:

1. Gather all your medicines together.

Look through medicine cabinets, drawers, purses and anywhere else you keep medications. Put all the medicine vials and containers on a table.

You should bring together:

- Prescription medicines
- OTC (non-prescription) medicines
- Herbal products
- Dietary supplements
- Home remedies

Be sure to include OTC and herbal products, dietary supplements and home remedies since they might interact with prescription medications or affect health conditions. Also, check the expiration date (on the container for non-prescription medicines) to see if any have expired. Prescription medicines over a year old may also be candidates for disposal. See the JustAskBlue August 2009 newsletter for medication disposal instructions.

2. Write the list.

Using a blank sheet of paper or a medication history form (see below for examples), write down the following for each medicine:

- Medicine name
- Strength (this is listed as a number usually followed by mg or gm)
- Dosage (number of tablets/capsules taken at one time)
- What time of day you take the medicine (e.g., morning, supper)
- Whether you take it every day or just when needed
- The reason for taking the medicine
- The name of the doctor that prescribed the medicine

Not sure why you're taking a certain medicine or how often it should be taken? Go ahead and list it anyway. Going over the list with your doctor or pharmacist will provide the perfect opportunity to fill in the blanks.

Other important information to include is:

- Your name and date of birth
- Names and telephone numbers of emergency contacts
- Medication and food allergies
- Dates on which medications were started
- Past medications used, the dates stopped and why they were stopped

When a medication was started can tell health professionals if you have taken it long enough to get its full effect. Medications taken in the past helps your doctor and pharmacist know what has worked (or not worked). It also helps them choose new medications that are likely to be effective and safe.

3. Tell it like it is!

Write down exactly how you are taking the medicine, not just how it was prescribed. For example, suppose you were prescribed calcium and Vitamin D twice a day to keep your bones strong. But, you only took them twice a week. If a bone scan shows that your bones are getting weak, your doctor might prescribe a new prescription medicine for you thinking that the calcium and Vitamin D did not work. If your doctor knows that you only took the calcium and Vitamin D twice a week, the doctor might recommend instead that you simply take them more often.

4. Show it off.

Show your medication list to your doctors, pharmacists and dentists so they can make safer decisions. Sharing the list is especially important when you:

- visit a new doctor.
- see a new dentist.
- go to a new pharmacy.
- go to the hospital or emergency room.
- need EMS care.
- have a routine medical check-up.
- need help choosing a new prescription plan.

5. Tell others

Tell your family members and emergency contact people where your list is so they can find it in an emergency. Put it on your refrigerator, tack it to a bulletin board or keep it with your spare house key. Put the list in a place that is easy for people to find – not under lock and key.

6. Give your list to your pharmacy

Your pharmacy already has a record of the prescriptions you filled there. By looking at your list, they can add all of your mail-order prescriptions, OTC medicines, herbal products and dietary supplements to their record. Emergency rooms and hospital personnel often call pharmacies to check the medications a person is taking. Also, be sure to ask your pharmacist to check your list for possible drug interactions.

7. Keep it with you

Keep a medication list with you at all times. You never know when you may need it. A wallet size card can be handy. Emergency personnel are most likely to find your list if it is in your wallet. If your list is on a large piece of paper, keep it in a plastic bag so it is clean and readable.

8. Update the list

Update your list whenever you start a new prescription or nonprescription medicine or a new herbal or dietary supplement. Write down when medications were stopped. Make sure that all copies of your list are current. Go over your list with your doctor and pharmacist on a regular basis to make sure their records are also up-to-date.

Medication list forms

There are special forms you can use for preparing your medication list. Some are full-page lists, some are wallet sized, and some are electronic versions available for free on the Internet.

The Washington Patient Safety Coalition has compiled examples of medication list forms. The forms can be printed and completed; one is even an application (app) for your iPhone or iPod Touch.

<http://www.wapatientssafety.org/mymedicinelist/examples.html>

Another on-line medication list service is MyMedSchedule. It allows you to keep an up-to-date record of your medicines and to print dosing reminder calendars and pocket-sized lists. It can be found at this link: <http://www.mymedschedule.com/>

Do not wait – make that list! Keep it with you. You'll use it more often than you thought and it could be a lifesaver!