

## You and Your Medications – MAP the 3 Rs



For anyone in pain, medications can be an essential part of a treatment plan for better health and improved quality of life. In order for medications to be as effective as possible with as few problems as possible, a medication action plan (MAP) should be an integral part of everyday life.

The National Council for Patient Information and Education (NCPPIE) suggests “3 Rs for Safe Medicine Use” that should be part of any MAP. Those three Rs are risk, respect, and responsibility:

1. **Risk:** recognize that all medications (prescription and over-the-counter) have risks as well as benefits; and you need to weigh these risks and benefits carefully for every medication you take.
2. **Respect:** respect the power of your medication and the value of medications properly used.
3. **Responsibility:** take responsibility for learning about how to take each medication safely. Being responsible also means following this important rule: when in doubt, ask first. Your healthcare professional can help you get the facts you need to use medications correctly.

Especially if your doctor is prescribing a new medication, it's important to ask questions about it. If you're in your doctor's office when the medication is prescribed, that's the prime time to ask questions. Remember that your pharmacist is also a member of your healthcare team and there to answer your questions. Keep the patient information sheets that come with your prescriptions so you can refer to them later if you need to. Here are some questions to remember to ask:

- What is the medication supposed to do?
- Is this the brand or generic name? (Is a generic version available?)
- When do I take the medication - and for how long?
- Should I take this medication on an empty stomach or with food?
- What should I do if I forget a dose?
- What foods, drinks, medications, dietary supplements, or activities should I avoid while taking this medication?
- What are the possible side effects, and what do I do if they occur?
- When should I expect the medication to begin to work, and how will I know if it is working?
- Will this new prescription work safely with the other prescription and non-prescription medications I am taking?
- Are there any special considerations for storing this medication?

We see many news reports about medications. Negative news reports naturally raise concerns, and it's important to get your questions answered. Some questions you may wish to ask are:

- Do you think the benefits of taking this medication outweigh the risks?
- What are the risks associated with taking this medication?
- Are there any alternative medications to the one I am taking?

- Are there any alternatives to this medication, such as making lifestyle changes, If yes, should I try these?
- What side effects should I look out for and when should I call you about them?
- Can we set up an appointment in 1 - 3 months to see how I'm doing with this medication?

### **Over-the-Counter (OTC) Medications**

It's essential to remember that OTC medications and dietary supplements are medications too. They should always be mentioned to your doctors, and you should know their potential benefits, side effects, and interactions with other medications.

### **Everyday Precautions**

It's difficult at best to know the attitudes and behaviors of other people. Too many people think nothing about asking someone to share their medications or even just taking some without asking. Many medications, especially opioids, have a high "street value." The medications prescribed for you are a private issue that doesn't need to be discussed with people other than perhaps a spouse, close friend, or family member who provides you with help and assistance in taking care of yourself. The fewer people who know you have opioids, sleep medications, and other prescription medications, the better.

There are appropriate precautions to take:

- At home, store opioids, sleep medications, and other medications that could be misused or sold in a locking cabinet or safe.
- If you carry such medications in your purse or pocket, put them in something such as a small cosmetics bag or coin purse so anyone catching a glimpse of it will not know what's in it.
- When traveling, lock your medications in the room safe or a piece of luggage if you leave them in your room.
- When throwing away empty bottles and packaging, be sure they can't be identified if your trash is spilled. Remove and destroy labeling that identifies you, the name of the medication, and the prescription number.
- If using injectable medications, place needles and syringes in a sharps container. Empty injectable medication vials can be put in your sharps container or can be thrown in the trash if you remove the label.

### **Storing Medications**

- Store medications in a cool, dark place.
- Do not store medications in the bathroom "medicine cabinet." Typical variations in temperature and moisture in bathrooms makes them the wrong place to store medications.
- Do not use daily medication dispensers for opioids or other medications that can be misused or sold unless you plan to lock them away.
- Store medications in their original packaging when possible. Especially with generics, it's too easy to mistake one medication for another.
- If your medications are lost or stolen, call the police and your doctor. Remember that some medications such as opioids, neuronal stabilizing agents (anticonvulsants), and antidepressants should not be discontinued abruptly.

### **Disposing of Medications**

Your MAP should include a plan for the disposal of expired medications and medications you no longer take. Flushing them or pouring them down the drain prevents their use, but some

medications can get into the ground water and present a hazard. Some communities have programs for hazardous waste. Your doctor or pharmacist can advise you of the best way to dispose of these medications.

### **Wrap-Up**

Setting up your own MAP will help you avoid any medication related problems and keep you and your family safe.

By knowing the risks of your medication, respecting their power and value, and taking responsibility for learning about how to take each medication safely, you'll be using medications as effectively and safely as possible.

If you encounter questions and concerns setting up your MAP, your doctor, nurse, nurse practitioner, and pharmacist can help you address them.

MAPs are your plan for health and safety.

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