YOUR MEDICATIONS: USING THEM SAFELY

AT HOME

- Use a medication box or other system to manage your daily medications.
- Write out your medication schedule and keep it with your medications.
- Try to incorporate taking medications into your daily routine. For example, get used to taking your morning medications immediately after you brush your teeth.
- Sit or stand when swallowing medications. This prevents them from getting stuck in your throat. Always drink plenty of water after swallowing a tablet or capsule.
- Do not crush medications until you check with your pharmacist.
- Never take medications prescribed for someone else.
- Never stop taking a medication without first consulting your physician. Some medications cannot be stopped abruptly without causing serious side effects.
- Keep medications out of reach of children and memory-impaired persons.
- Store all medications in a cool, dry place. A closet may be better than a medicine cabinet.
- Discard outdated & unused medications. They will lose their potency, and may conflict with medications you are currently taking. Do not dispose of medications in the sink or toilet, where they will further contaminate the water supply. Drop-off programs (such as through the Hy Vee pharmacies in Omaha) will safely dispose of medications. If you dispose of medications in the trash, take them out of their containers, mix them with coffee grounds or kitty litter, seal them in a plastic bag and throw the bag away.

AT THE DOCTOR’S OFFICE AND THE PHARMACY

- Get clear instructions regarding your medications:
  - Purpose: What condition is the medication meant to treat?
  - Dose: How many doses do I take per day, and at what times?
  - Duration: How long must I take the medication?
  - Effects: How will I know if the medication is working? How long will it take it before I notice its full benefit?
  - Side Effects: What possible side effects should I look for? Who should I call if I think I’m having an unwanted side effect?
  - Restrictions: Should I take the medication with or without food? Should I avoid certain things while I’m taking the medicine? (i.e. alcohol, dairy products, sun exposure, over-the-counter medications).
• Bring your medications, or a list of your medications, with you whenever you visit your doctor(s). Be sure all of your doctors are aware of any over-the-counter medications, vitamins or herbal remedies you are taking.

• Ask your primary care doctor for help to simplify your medication schedule to reduce the total number of times you must take your medications each day.

• Tell your doctors if you have ever suffered allergies or side effects to medications.

• If you cannot afford a medication that a doctor has prescribed for you, ask the doctor to help you obtain the medication free of charge through the pharmaceutical company’s Patient Assistance Program.

• Have all your prescriptions filled at one pharmacy, if possible.

• Ask your pharmacist about generic medications or less expensive brand-name medications that might be as effective as a medication your doctor has prescribed.

• Ask your pharmacist about easy-open medication containers.

• Ask your pharmacist for large-print labels on your medication containers.

• Ask your pharmacist whether your medications can be mailed or delivered to your home.

• Ask your pharmacist about medication boxes, one-dose packages and memory-jogging devices to help you take your medicines correctly. The pharmacy may be able to call you or send you a reminder card when it’s time to refill a prescription.

• Ask your pharmacist if any of your medications will interact (work against each other).

• Ask your pharmacist if medication for any one of your medical problems can complicate other medical problems you have.

• Ask your pharmacist for help selecting non-prescription medications. This is especially important if you suffer from memory problems, as some over-the-counter medications can increase confusion.

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