

What to ask your pharmacist

to Help Prevent Medical Errors

Pharmacists are an excellent but often underutilized source of information about drugs. All pharmacists may not have time to answer the questions suggested below. However, you may wish to look for a pharmacist who is responsive to your questions and concerns. Also, prices vary from one pharmacy to another, so you may wish to comparison shop for value.

SELECTING A PHARMACIST

“When appropriate, do you substitute generic equivalents for brand-name drugs?”

You can ask your pharmacist whether a generic drug product will be as effective as a brand-name drug. Generic drugs are generally less expensive than brand-name drugs. If you want generic drugs, ask your pharmacist for them. In some states, laws limit the ability of a pharmacist to substitute generics without the physician’s approval.

“Will you compound special prescriptions for me?”

Certain medicines still require mixing at the pharmacy, and some pharmacists do not provide this service.

“Where can I get medicines in an emergency?”

You may wish to select a pharmacy that is open late or that has an emergency phone number after office hours.

“Will your pharmacy deliver medicines when I can’t pick them up?”

“Is there a delivery fee?”

“Do you offer senior citizen discounts? How much?”

“Do you accept all forms of prescription drug insurance?”

In addition to private insurance, Medicaid has a Maximum Allowable Cost (MAC) program that places a ceiling on reimbursement for certain drugs. If the drug is covered under the MAC program, and you qualify under Medicaid, the government may pay the entire cost, or you may pay only the difference between the MAC limit and what the pharmacy charges.

“Do you keep patient profiles listing all the medicines each customer has purchased?”

A patient profile should include a summary of your medical history so that the pharmacist can check for possible problems. This record also may be useful for tax purposes. Keep in mind that this service will only be useful if you buy all your medicine from the same pharmacy.

WHAT TO ASK YOUR PHARMACIST ABOUT DRUG USE

You may want to ask your pharmacist the following questions about drugs that have been prescribed for you.

- “What are the generic and trade names of this drug and what is it for?”
- “Do you have any written information about this medicine?”
- “What does this medicine cost?”
- “How long will it take this medicine to work?”
- “What will happen if I do not take this medicine?”
- “Should I keep taking the medicine until the prescription is used up, or just until I feel better?”
- “What should I do if I miss a dose?”
- “Do I take this drug with food?”
- “Should I avoid any types of food or beverage or other medicines while I am taking this drug?”
- “Can I take this drug and drink alcohol?”
- “Will smoking affect the way this drug works?”
- “While taking this drug, should I avoid any particular activities, such as driving a car, exercise, or exposure to the sun?”
- “What side effects can I expect from this medication? Which ones should I report to the doctor?”
- “How should I store this medicine?”
- “Can I get this prescription refilled?”
- “Can I get a larger quantity of the medication so it will last longer and cost less?”
- “Will you put this medicine in an easy-to-open container for me?”
- “Does this medicine come in a more convenient form?”
- “What over-the-counter medicines do you suggest for my cold (or cough, or burn, etc.)?”

 **Distributed by:**
PULSE of America Inc.
Persons United Limiting Substandards and Errors
in Healthcare
1-800-96PULSE - www.PULSEAmerica.org