



PainSAFE™
Safety & Access For Everyone

 **American Pain Foundation**
A United Voice of Hope and Power over Pain

10 Tips for Taking Your Pain Medications Safely

Knowing how to take your medications the right way not only helps you get the most benefit, it could also save your life.

Get the most from your medications and stay safe in the process. Here are some tips that may help:

- 1. Give your health care providers a list of all the medications you are currently taking.** Use APF's medication chart to write down all prescription and over-the-counter medications, vitamins, supplements and herbal remedies that you take. Review this list with your health care providers or pharmacist often. Carry an updated copy in your purse or wallet at all times.
- 2. Tell your health care provider and pharmacist if you've ever had an adverse or allergic reaction to a medication.** Make sure this information is included in your medical chart, along with existing and previous medical conditions. Wear a medical alert bracelet if you have known allergy to any medications.
- 3. Get to know your medications.** Familiarize yourself with the brand or generic name, dose and potential side effects. Keep in mind, some medication names may be abbreviated on labeling (for example, APAP is short for acetaminophen).

Make sure you understand exactly what the medication is for and how often you need to take it. Many medication names look alike when handwritten. Help keep your medications straight by asking your health care provider to jot down the purpose of each medication on all written prescriptions.
- 4. Read the label as soon as you pick up your prescription.** Check to make sure it is the right medication, at the right dose and in the right formulation (pill, liquid, patch, etc.) as ordered by your health care provider. Keep medications in their original containers so you can easily identify them.
- 5. Take each medication exactly as directed.**
 - Never chew, crush or break pills unless your health care provider or pharmacist has told you to do so. Doing so can change the way medicine is absorbed in your body, causing it to work differently.
 - Never change the amount of medication you take or when you take it without talking with your health care provider first.
 - Ask if you should be concerned about potentially dangerous interactions with other medications you take and if you should avoid certain foods, alcohol or direct sunlight.
 - Always turn on the lights when you take your medication. If you can't see, you might take the wrong medication.
- 6. Always use the measuring instrument — cup or dropper — that comes with the medication.** Using a kitchen teaspoon for any liquid preparation will not give you the right dose.
- 7. When possible, only use one pharmacy for all of your medication needs.** Having all of your medication information in a centralized computer database will help you and your pharmacist keep track of your prescriptions and alert you to possible adverse interactions. This may be a challenge if some of your prescription medications are ordered through bulk pharmacy or if your local pharmacy cannot or will not stock your pain medication.
- 8. Don't take medications that have been prescribed for someone else, and never share your prescription medication** with others, regardless of the situation.
- 9. Store all medicines in a dry and cool place that can't be reached by children, pets or anyone who might misuse them.** The bathroom medicine cabinet isn't ideal because it is warm and moist. Be sure to lock up controlled substances like opioids, amphetamines, sedatives and stimulants as these are sought after by others. It's also a good idea to keep medications for people separate from those for your pets.
- 10. Take stock of your medications on a regular basis.** Don't hang on to medications that you are no longer taking. Know how to properly dispose of unused or expired medications and make sure to remove all labels from the bottles before putting them in the trash. See www.smarxtdisposal.net for instructions on disposal.

Be Label Smart and always read the "Drug Facts" label or prescription insert carefully. Call your health care provider if the medication doesn't seem to be working or if you have any side effects.

For more medication safety information, visit PainSAFE at www.painsafe.org.