

CONSIDERING SELF-MEDICATION?

PRINCIPLES OF SAFE SELF MEDICATION

It is a common scenario that has a direct impact on your health: you are on medication but cannot recall if you took it. Or, you took your medication but not at the prescribed time. By adopting the basic principles of medication administration used by professional nurses, you can ensure compliance with your specific medication regime.

Medication delivery is broken into a sequence of 6 “Rights” to ensure safety. These include:

1. Right Person
2. Right Medication
3. Right Dose
4. Right Route
5. Right Time
6. Right Documentation

RIGHT PERSON

Scenario: Mrs. Young has been prescribed the diuretic Lasix to treat her edema. Her roommate is experiencing new onset swelling of her feet and asks her for a dose of Lasix.

Prescribed medication is to be taken only by the person it is intended. Sharing medication has potential serious health consequences. For example, if Mrs. Young's roommate has a low blood pressure or an undiagnosed electrolyte imbalance, the introduction of Lasix can be damaging. Hence, the first link in the chain of safe medication administration is always the “Right Person”.

RIGHT MEDICATION:

Scenario: Mr. Jones has been advised by his physician to take Acetaminophen as needed for discomfort. He takes Aspirin instead.

Although Acetaminophen and Aspirin are both common over-the-counter analgesics they are distinctively different. To complicate matters, there are many medications with sound-alike names elevating the chance for error. Check and double check your pharmacy label and ask questions if in doubt. Also be aware that generic substitutions will look different in shape and color. Again, if in doubt, ask your pharmacist for verification that what is in the bottle is in fact, the "Right Medication"

RIGHT DOSE:

Scenario: Mrs. Jones takes Aspirin 325mg tablets instead of the prescribed 81mg.

The "Right Dose" is critical to effective medication management. Your medication dosage has been determined by your physician based on lab values, symptoms, and your specific diagnosis. Varying dosages without your physician knowledge can lead to compromised medical management.

RIGHT ROUTE:

Scenario: Mr. Smith swallows his nitroglycerin sublingual tablet.

Some medications are available in multiple forms. Nitroglycerin is available as a capsule, a sublingual tablet, and a transdermal patch. Swallowing a sublingual tablet illustrates a medication taken via the wrong route. Your pharmacy label will specify the "Right Route" a medication is to be taken.

RIGHT TIME:

Scenario: Mrs. B forgot to take her diuretic in the morning but makes up the dose by taking it that night.

It is a good idea to organize your medications according to the prescribed time of day they are to be taken. If missing scheduled medication is a concern, consult with your pharmacist. Many pharmacies offer color-coded packaging to help keep you on track. The use of "pill holders" is not recommended as medications should always be taken from their original packaging.

RIGHT DOCUMENTATION:

Scenario: Mrs. Jones often forgets if she took her afternoon medication.

We all forget things, especially when the action has become a routine. It is not uncommon to forget taking medications. The best practice to alleviate this concern is to simply write it down. Make this task even more convenient by placing a notebook where your medications are stored.

OTHER IMPORTANT FACTORS:

Correct medication storage plays an important role in ensuring the potency of your prescription.

Be sure to check your pharmacy label for manufacturer storage recommendations. Some common recommendations include:

- Store unopened Insulin vials in a refrigerator. Be sure to date your Insulin upon opening as it is only good for 28 days.
- Many suppositories are to be stored at room temperature.
- Most eye drops have a limited shelf life after opening.

This handout is to be used for general information. Please consult your health care provider with medication related questions.

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