



When it comes to using medicine, there is no such thing as completely safe. All medicines have risks. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approval of a drug means that the benefits outweigh the known risks that are outlined on the drug's label.

Physicians, physician assistants, nurses, pharmacists and YOU make up your health care team. To reduce the risks related to using medicines and to get the maximum benefit, you need to play an active role on the team.

### Speak Up

The more information your health care team members know about you, the better they can develop a plan of care tailored to you.

The members of your team need to know:

- your medical history
- any allergies and sensitivities you have
- the medications you take routinely and occasionally-prescription and over-the-counter
- any dietary supplements you use, including vitamins and herbals
- other therapies you use
- anything that may affect your ability to use the medication

### Ask Questions

Your health care team members help you make the best-informed choices, but **you have to ask the right questions**. When you meet with a team member, have your questions written down and take notes.

You may also want to bring along a friend or relative to help you understand and remember the answers.

Use the Question Guide at the end of this page to help you gather the information you need from your health care team. If you don't understand an answer, ask again.

### Learn the Facts

Before you purchase a prescription or over-the-counter medicine, learn and understand as much about it as you can, including:

- generic and brand names
- active ingredients
- proper uses--(indications/contraindications)
- instructions
- warnings and precautions

- interactions--with food, dietary supplements, other medicines
- side effects/adverse reactions
- expiration dates

Drug information designed for the consumer is available from a variety of sources, your pharmacy, the manufacturer, the library, the bookstore, and the Internet. If there is something you don't understand, ask your health care team.

### Balance the Benefits and Risks - Make Your Decision

After you have exchanged all the information, weigh all your options. At this point you must decide if the benefits you hope to achieve from the medicine outweigh its known risks. The final choice is yours.

### Follow Directions

When you are ready to use the medicine, maximize the benefits and minimize the risks by following the instructions printed on the drug label:

- *Read the label every time you fill your prescription--before you leave the pharmacy. Be sure you have the right medicine and understand how to use it.*
- *Read the label every time you are about to use the medicine--to be sure it's the right medicine, for the right patient, in the right amount, in the right way, at the right time.*
- *Take the recommended dose exactly as prescribed--no matter how tempted you are to use more to feel better faster.*
- *Finish all the medicine as directed--even if you start to feel better before all your medicine is completed.*

### Report Back to the Team

Pay attention to how you feel and notify your health care team of any problems.

If you have doubts that the medicine is working effectively, don't stop taking it without checking with the team. Some medications take longer to show a benefit, and some need to be withdrawn gradually to decrease undesirable effects. If you experience a side effect, let your health care team know immediately. An adjustment in the dosage or a change in medication may be needed.

### Question Guide

Use this guide to gather the information you need to know from your health care team.

- What are the brand and generic names of the medicine?
  - Can I use a generic form?
- What is the medicine for and what effect should I expect?
  - Does this drug replace any other medicine I have been using?
- How and when will I use it, what amount will I use, and for how long?
  - What do I do if I miss a dose?
- Should I avoid any other medicines, (prescription or over-the-counter), dietary supplements, drinks, foods or activities while using this drug?
- When should I notice a difference or improvement?
  - When should I report back to the team?
  - Will I need to have any testing to monitor this drug's effects?
- Can this medicine be used safely with all my other medications and therapies?
  - Could there be interactions?
- What are the possible side effects?
  - What do I do if a side effect occurs?
- How and where do I store this medicine?
- Where and how can I get written information about this medicine?
  - What other sources of information can I use to make my decision?

Go to <http://www.fda.gov/drugs> or call 1 (888) INFO-FDA for more information about how to be an active member of your health care team and to get additional drug information.

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#### **About IFFGD**

The International Foundation for Gastrointestinal Disorders (IFFGD) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit education and research organization. We work to promote awareness, scientific advancement, and improved care for people affected by chronic digestive conditions. Our mission is to inform, assist, and support people affected by gastrointestinal disorders. Founded in 1991, we rely on donors to carry out our mission. Visit our website at: [www.iffgd.org](http://www.iffgd.org).

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#### **About the Publication**

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