



# Safe Medicine Use

A GUIDE FOR OLDER ADULTS  
AND CAREGIVERS



UNIVERSITY *of* MARYLAND  
SCHOOL OF PHARMACY

THE PETER LAMY CENTER  
ON DRUG THERAPY AND AGING

CONTACT US

410-706-2434

[lamycenter@rx.umaryland.edu](mailto:lamycenter@rx.umaryland.edu)

## Call the Poison Center if You Think:

- A medicine was not taken as directed
- Too much medicine was taken by accident
- A child took or you suspect they took your medicine



Call 911 if someone has trouble breathing, trouble waking up, seizures, or other life-threatening signs.

## The Maryland Poison Center:

- Call to speak directly to a nurse or pharmacist
- Is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
- Is a free phone service
- Can help in more than 150 languages using interpreters

## Know Your Medicines

It is important to know as much as possible about your medicines to prevent poisonings. Below are examples of different types of medicines.

### Prescription



- Must be prescribed by your health professional
- Get directly from doctor's office, a pharmacy or mail-order pharmacy

### Vitamins, Dietary supplements, Herbal remedies



- No prescription needed; intended to supplement your diet
- Examples are: Vitamin C, Fish Oil and Echinacea

### Over-the-Counter (OTC)



- No prescription needed from your health professional
- Generally safe if taken as directed on the Drug Facts Label
- Examples are: Pain relievers, cold medicines, laxatives



**All medicines should be taken with care. Any type of medicine can interact when taken together and cause unwanted effects.**

## Ask your pharmacist or other health professional these questions...

1. What is the name of the medicine?
2. Why am I using the medicine?
3. What are the side effects?
4. **How do I use the medicine?**

- When do I take the medicine?
- How much do I take?
- How long do I take the medicine?

## Keep a Current Medicine List



- Bring an up-to-date list of all the medicines you are using to all of your health professional's appointments.
- This includes all prescription medicines, over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and herbal/dietary supplements.

## Keep All Medicines Up, Away, and Out of Sight

Put your medicines

**up** **AND** **away**  
and out of sight

- No container is child-proof.
- Store your medicines in a safe place so that children, teens, adult visitors, and pets cannot see them or get to them. This will prevent accidental poisonings.



# General Tips for Using Medicines Safely

- All medicines count. Review all of your medicines at every health professional visit
- Never use more medicine than prescribed. Using more does not mean you will get better faster.
- Follow the directions on the label.
- Do not take old or expired medicines.

## Tips for Using Prescription Medicine Safely

- Do not share your medicine with others.
- Only use prescription medicine with your name on it.
- If possible, use the same pharmacy to fill all your prescriptions.

## Tips for Using Over-the-Counter Medicine Safely

- **Compare the Active Ingredients**  
Make sure the active ingredients are not the same for two or more medicines that you are using. Too much can harm you.
- **Check With Your Pharmacist or Other Health Professional**  
If you are being treated for a medical condition or taking prescription medicines, talk with your pharmacist or other health professional before taking any OTC medicines.



# Know What's On the Label

Be sure to read the Drug Facts Label on all OTC medicines before taking them. The label has important information to help you use the medicine safely. It will also tell you when to get advice from a health professional. Below is an example of what the new OTC medicine label looks like.

| <b>Drug Facts</b>  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Active ingredient (in each tablet)</b>  | <b>Purpose</b>   |
| Chlorpheniramine maleate 2 mg  | Antihistamine  |
| <b>Uses</b> temporarily relieves these symptoms due to hay fever or other upper respiratory allergies:<br>■ sneezing ■ runny nose ■ itchy, watery eyes ■ itchy throat  |  |
| <b>Warnings</b>  |  |
| Ask a doctor before use if you have<br>■ glaucoma ■ a breathing problem such as emphysema or chronic bronchitis<br>■ trouble urinating due to an enlarged prostate gland   |  |
| Ask a doctor or pharmacist before use if you are taking tranquilizers or sedatives   |  |
| <b>When using this product</b><br>■ You may get drowsy ■ avoid alcoholic drinks<br>■ alcohol, sedatives, and tranquilizers may increase drowsiness<br>■ be careful when driving a motor vehicle or operating machinery<br>■ excitability may occur, especially in children |  |
| If <b>pregnant or breast-feeding</b> , ask a health professional before use.<br><b>Keep out of reach of children.</b> In case of overdose, get medical help or contact a Poison Control Center right away.   |  |
| <b>Directions</b>  |  |
| adults and children 12 years and over  | take 2 tablets every 4 to 6 hours;<br>not more than 12 tablets in 24 hours |
| children 6 years to under 12 years   | take 1 tablet every 4 to 6 hours;<br>not more than 6 tablets in 24 hours   |
| children under 6 years   | ask a doctor   |
| <b>Other information</b> store at 20-25° C (68-77° F) ■ protect from excessive moisture  |  |
| <b>Inactive ingredients</b> D&C yellow no. 10, lactose, magnesium stearate, microcrystalline cellulose, pregelatinized starch  |  |

- **Active Ingredient:** the ingredient in the medicine that makes it work; strength of medicine
- **Purpose:** how this medicine works or type of medicine (such as cough suppressant or pain reliever)
- **Uses:** symptoms or conditions the product will treat or prevent
- **Warnings:** when not to use this medicine; conditions that may require advice from a health professional before taking this medicine; possible interactions or unwanted effects; when to stop taking this medicine and when to contact a health professional
- **Directions:** instructions on how to take this medicine based on age

# Caregiver Corner

Here are some things that you can do to help older adults use medicine safely:

## **Keep a current medicine list**

This includes all prescription medicines, OTC medicines, vitamins and herbal/dietary supplements.

## **Plan ahead to refill prescriptions on time**

Get prescriptions refilled early to avoid running out of medicine.

## **Prevent interactions between medicines**

- It is important to tell health professionals about all medicines the older adult is using.
- Do not recommend new medicines without first checking with the pharmacist or other health professional.

## **Remember instructions from health professionals**

Ask doctors, nurses, and pharmacists to write down important information.

**Ask a pharmacist** or other health professional to help you develop a medicine-taking plan that fits the older adult's daily routine

## **Keep all medicines in their original and labeled containers.**

Be careful when you use a pill box to keep doses organized.



# Steps for Disposing of Medicine

## Drop-off Locations

- Permanent medicine drop-off locations are available in Maryland. The Maryland Poison Center can help find a location near you.
- Outside of Maryland, call the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) at 1-800-882-9539 to find a collection location near you.

## Follow these simple steps to dispose of medicines in the household trash

### MIX

Mix medicines (do not crush tablets or capsules) **with an unpalatable substance** such as dirt, kitty litter, or used coffee ground.



### PLACE

Place the mixture **in a container** such as a sealed plastic bag.



### THROW

Throw the container **in your household trash.**



### SCRATCH OUT

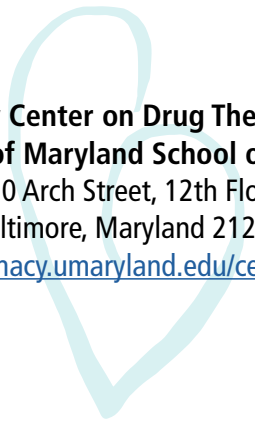
Scratch out **all personal information** on the prescription label of your empty pill bottle or empty medicine packaging to make it unreadable, then dispose of the container.



This brochure was produced as a collaboration between the Peter Lamy Center on Drug Therapy and Aging and the Maryland Poison Center.

Housed within the University of Maryland School of Pharmacy, the Peter Lamy Center on Drug Therapy and Aging's mission is to improve drug therapy for aging adults through innovative research, education, and clinical initiatives. The Center is named in honor of Dr. Peter P. Lamy, and has been in existence since 1978.

The Maryland Poison Center is part of the Department of Pharmacy Practice and Science at the University of Maryland School of Pharmacy. It is certified by the American Association of Poison Control Centers as a regional poison center. The Maryland Poison Center has provided poisoning treatment advice, education, and prevention services to Marylanders since 1972.



**The Peter Lamy Center on Drug Therapy and Aging**  
**University of Maryland School of Pharmacy**  
220 Arch Street, 12th Floor  
Baltimore, Maryland 21201  
[www.pharmacy.umaryland.edu/centers/lamy/](http://www.pharmacy.umaryland.edu/centers/lamy/)

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