

## Getting the Most Out of Your Medications

Ask your health-care professionals the following questions to better your understanding of your medications:

- **What is the purpose of this medication?**
- **What can I expect from this medication?**
- **How long will I be taking it?**
- **Should I avoid anything while taking it?**
- **Is a generic version of the medication available?** (Generic medications often are less expensive.)

**You are the best advocate for your health.**

## Medication- and/or Nutrition-related Websites to Explore

These websites provide free evidence-based information:

- **[www.webmd.com](http://www.webmd.com)** - The WebMD website allows you to search a medication by name and read specific safety and administration information on that medication.
- **[www.mayoclinic.org](http://www.mayoclinic.org)** - The Mayo Clinic website provides information about medications (prescription and nonprescription), disease states, and ways to promote a healthful lifestyle.
- **[www.fda.gov/Drugs/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/default.htm](http://www.fda.gov/Drugs/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/default.htm)** - The Food and Drug Administration website provides information for consumers on medication safety, disposal, purchasing and other educational resources.
- **[www.globalhealth.com/pharmacy.aspx](http://www.globalhealth.com/pharmacy.aspx)** - The consumer section of this pharmacist reference website provides information on a range of health-related topics.
- **[www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/)** - The Medline Plus website (National Institutes of Health) provides helpful information on health topics and medications.
- **[www.ChooseMyPlate.gov](http://www.ChooseMyPlate.gov)** - Based on the U.S. Dietary Guidelines for Americans, the MyPlate website provides nutrition information and ways to assess and track your diet for nutritional adequacy.
- **<http://ods.od.nih.gov/>** - The Office of Dietary Supplements (National Institutes of Health) provides the latest information about dietary supplements based on research. It provides many user-friendly fact sheets.

Ask your pharmacist for more information about medications. See a nutrition professional for more information about food and health.

This project was made possible, in part, with funding from the North Dakota Board of Pharmacy.

**For more information on this and other topics, see [www.ag.ndsu.edu](http://www.ag.ndsu.edu)**

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5M-8-14

FN1720

# Know Your Prescription and Nonprescription Medications

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EXTENSION

North Dakota State University, Fargo, North Dakota  
Reviewed May 2019

## Test Your Knowledge: How much do you know about drug-food interactions?

Match the following drug with the corresponding food interaction.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. ___ <b>Simvastatin</b><br>(cholesterol medication)           | A. Leafy green<br>vegetables                  |
| 2. ___ <b>Levothyroxine</b><br>(thyroid medication)             | B. Grapefruit/<br>grapefruit juice            |
| 3. ___ <b>Warfarin</b><br>(blood clot prevention<br>medication) | C. Milk or calcium-<br>containing<br>products |

Answers: 1. B; 2. C; 3. A.



## How do I know how long to take my medications?

Often, the type of medication you are taking determines the length of time it should be used. These are the three types of medications:

- 1. Chronic** – those you take for greater than one year or lifelong. *Examples:* heart, blood pressure, diabetes or cholesterol medications
- 2. Short-term** – those you take for a few weeks or less than one year. *Example:* antibiotics
- 3. As needed** – those you take as needed, which may be a short or long time. *Examples:* ointments, creams, sleep-aids, pain relievers

Speak with your doctor about how long each of your medications should be used so you do not continue to take medications you no longer need. Taking medications longer than needed can add unnecessary costs and lead to unwanted side effects.

## What do I need to know about nonprescription products?

Nonprescription products, often called over-the-counter medications or OTCs, may be important in maintaining your good health. However, they may pose additional health risks if they are not used with caution.

Keep the following in mind:

- Just because a vitamin or other supplement is “natural” does not mean it always is safe.
- Vitamins and supplements are regulated loosely and you have no guarantee of safety and purity.
- Vitamins and supplements cannot replace a balanced diet and good eating habits.
- Nonprescription products may have an effect on the prescription medications you take.

Before you begin a nonprescription medication, speak with your doctor and pharmacist to ensure that it does not pose side effects, drug interactions or other concerns to your health. Visit with a nutrition professional, such as a registered dietitian, for expert advice about dietary concerns.

## Did you know that foods you eat may interact with your medications?

Many foods you eat may interact with your medications, making them less effective, toxic or useless. This means many medications have special directions for taking them on an “empty stomach” or “with food.”

- “With food” means to take your medication right before eating, with a meal or right after eating.
- “Take on an empty stomach” means to take your medication two hours before or after eating.

Speak with your pharmacist about specific foods to avoid, eat consistently or eat several hours before or after your medications.

## How do I store my medications properly?

Storing your medications properly can prevent the physical and chemical breakdown of your medications. Proper storage also can prevent your medications from getting into the hands of those they are not intended for, such as young children.

### To avoid unsafe medication storage:

- Refrigerate medications appropriately.
- Keep your medications in the original packaging.
- Avoid exposure to extreme temperatures.
- Avoid storage in the bathroom.
- Store in high places to keep away from children’s reach.



## How do I dispose of unwanted medications properly?

Excess, expired or unwanted medications should be disposed of as soon as possible. This is because unwanted medications may lead to unintentional poisonings, misuse or abuse of medications by others, and environmental contamination.

To dispose of your unwanted medications properly, follow these tips:

- Ask about medication disposal or “medication take-back programs” at your local pharmacy.
- Call your local police department.
- If these options are not available, mix your unwanted medication with sand, cat litter box filler or coffee grounds, and dispose of it in a spill-proof container in your household trash.