

The importance of proper use of medications for you and your child with special health care needs

Information about medicines is not easy to understand. But you can work with your pharmacist to learn about the medications your child takes for his or her special health care needs.

What should I know about new medications for my child?

When you fill a new prescription medicine for your child, asking questions is a good place to start. Talk with the doctor and the pharmacist. Read the information they give you. Use the Safe Medications website (www.safemedications.org) to learn more:

- ▶ What is it for? Why is my child taking it?
- ▶ How do I give it to my child?
- ▶ When is the best time to give it to him?
- ▶ How much should he take and how often?
- ▶ What should we do if he misses a dose?
- ▶ What should we expect? (How do we know it is working? What are possible side effects?)
- ▶ Where should we keep it?
- ▶ What are the brand and generic names of the medicines?
- ▶ What does it look like?
- ▶ How long will he need to take it?

- ▶ Does this interact with his other medications or any foods?
- ▶ Does this replace anything else he was taking?

If needed, ask for the pharmacist. It's the pharmacist's job to help you. They often can be busy helping others, but it's worth the wait! You might also ask the pharmacist if you could call or return at a less busy time. Get to know the pharmacist so you can ask for him or her by name. The more you work with the same pharmacist, the more they become *your* pharmacist.

Be sure to go to the same pharmacy every time. This ensures that one pharmacy has a complete record of your child's medicines. If you change pharmacies a lot, it can increase the chance of errors.

How can I keep my child safe when taking his or her medications?

All medicines have risks. None are completely safe. Here are ten tips for parents to help you be "medwise" and to keep your child safe when giving them medicine. These tips are adapted from "Ten Tips for Parents" at Be MedWise®.

- ▶ When you are in doubt, ask! Ask the doctor or pharmacist.
- ▶ Tell your child's doctor AND the pharmacist about all of your child's medicines. This includes



medicines you buy without seeing a doctor such as “over-the-counter” (OTC) medicines, herbals, vitamins, and supplements. They can help you make sure there are no serious interactions (dangers when mixing the medicines).

- ▶ Know your child’s weight. This helps you give the proper dose of the medicine. The product label should tell you how much to give based on weight and age.
- ▶ Always be careful to follow directions on the label.
- ▶ Use the dropper, dosing cup, or other device that comes with your child’s medicine. It is made just for that medicine. It will help you give the right amount to your child.
- ▶ Be careful not to double up on certain ingredients if you use more than one OTC medicine. Some OTC medicines contain the same pain relievers and other ingredients.
- ▶ Give babies and children only those medicines that are made just for them. These are based on weight and age.
- ▶ Keep in mind that most OTC medicines are to help you or your child feel better. They do not cure illnesses or shorten the time that your child is sick.
- ▶ Be sure you have enough light to see when you give medicines. Do not give medicines in the dark.
- ▶ Teach your child that medicine is not candy. He or she should not touch, smell, or taste medications without supervision or guidance.

What about medicines that are not taken by mouth?

Learn how to give medicines the right way. If they are not given the right way, they will not work as well,

and they could cause harm. “How do I give ear, nose, or eye drops to my child? Nose sprays? Rectal suppositories? How should my child use her inhaler?” The website “Safe Medications” at www.safemedications.org can help you answer these questions with step-by-step “how to” directions.

Keep a medicine list for your child in your wallet. Include *at least* the name of the medicine, the strength (e.g., milligrams or mg), the amount he takes, when he takes it, what he takes it for, and who the prescriber is (i.e., the doctor’s name). For a form you can use, see: My Medicine List. Safe Medication (<http://www.safemedication.com/safemed/MyMedicineList.aspx>).

Resources for families

www.talkaboutrx.org/—National Council on Patient Information and Education (NCPPIE) works to improve how medicines are used through better communication. Some of its programs are to help families and other consumers. These include:

- Be MedWise® (www.bemedwise.org)
- Medicine Safety: A Toolkit for Families (<http://www.learnaboutrxsafety.org/>)
- Tools for Consumers (http://www.talkaboutrx.org/med_users_tools.jsp)

Institute for Safe Medication Practices (ISMP). ISMP is a nonprofit organization that works to prevent medicine errors and to ensure safe medicine use. Its consumer branch is:

- ConsumerMedSafety.org (<http://www.consumermedsafety.org/>)

References

Key Questions. How to take your medications safely. *Institute for Safe Medication Practices*. Retrieved from <http://www.ismp.org/Newsletters/consumer/alerts/Brochure.asp>

Ten Tips for Parents. Be MedWise®. *National Council on Patient Information and Education*. Retrieved from http://www.bemedwise.org/ten_ways/top_tips_parents.htm

Wyoming Family to Family Health Information Center

<http://www.uwyo.edu/wind/f2f/>

Wyoming Institute for Disabilities: 1-888-989-9463

UPLIFT—Federation of Families: 1-888-875-4383



Wyoming Department of Health

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