

# Your Role in Preventing Medicine Errors

## Taking Medicines Correctly

Some of the most common medical errors involve medicines, both prescribed and over-the-counter products, including vitamins and herbs. These errors may include:

- taking the wrong medicine
- taking the wrong dose
- taking medicine at the wrong time
- taking medicines that interact with each other in a harmful way.

The best way you can help prevent medicine errors from happening to you is to be an active member of your health care team.

## Safe Medicine Use

Get all the information you need to be able to take your medicines correctly. Ask:

- Why am I taking this medicine?
- How do I take it and for how long?
- Are there side effects? What do I do if they occur? What can I do to avoid them?
- Are there any medicines, including over-the-counter medicines, herbs or supplements, that I should avoid while taking this medicine?
- Is there anything else I should avoid while taking this medicine?

The information should be in words *you* understand.

## When You Are at the Doctor's Office

- Make sure your health care provider knows all the medicines you take, even over-the-counter herbs and supplements. These include such products as aspirin, ibuprofen, or cough or cold medicines.
- Tell your health care provider about any allergies or side effects you have had to medicines.
- Bring a list of your medicines to your health care provider at each visit. He or she can review what you take and update your medical record.
- When you get a written prescription, make sure you can read it.

## When You Are at the Pharmacy

- Check medicine refills to be sure the pills are the same size and color.
- Read the directions on the label. If they sound confusing, ask about them. For example, does “take one tablet four times a day” mean take one tablet every 6 hours around the clock or just during normal waking hours?
- Ask for the best device to measure doses correctly if you take liquid medicine. A household teaspoon may not hold a true teaspoon of medicine. Ask how to use the device.

- Ask your pharmacist for written information about possible side effects and what to do if they occur.

If possible, use the same pharmacy each time so there will be a record of all your medicines in one place.

**Information adapted from the Agency  
for Healthcare Research and Quality.**