

HOW TO TAKE MEDICINES SAFELY



Source: Andrea Damm / pixello.de

A diabetes patient is about to take her combination insulin medication. Her insulin pen, containing fast-acting insulin, is inadvertently on her bedside table, too. The patient has poor vision and only checks the colour of the pen. As the two pens look alike, she uses the pen with the fast-acting (wrong) insulin. The mistake only comes to light when her blood sugar is found to be very low when checked by nursing staff.

DEAR PATIENT,

The example described here is precisely what happened in a Berlin hospital. It demonstrates something you probably know from your own experience. Often, it's not easy to take medication exactly as per the instructions. Particularly when you take several medicines, it's difficult to keep track of the right medicine, the right dose and the right time.

You're not the only one with this problem. Around one-third of patients over the age of 65 take four or more different medicines.

▶ OBSTACLES TO TAKING MEDICINES

It is estimated that around 50% of patients do not take their longterm prescribed medication correctly. An overly complicated medication plan, hectic everyday life or simply forgetfulness may be some of the causes. Many patients also have problems with their eyes or hands and this is an additional obstacle to taking medication correctly. Likewise, people find it difficult to take medication although they have no symptoms, for instance, for high blood pressure.

Furthermore, each medicine can cause side effects. For example, ACE inhibitors prescribed for the treatment of high blood pressure may cause an irritating cough. Sometimes, patients stop taking their medicines without consulting their doctor.

The regular, correct taking of medicine is often the decisive contributory factor to the successful management of chronic diseases like diabetes.

Studies show that the inadequate intake of medicines leads to an increased number of hospital admissions.

▶ CAUTION: OVER-THE-COUNTER DRUGS

Besides prescribed medicines, you may also perhaps take medicines available over-the-counter (OTC) without a prescription in your pharmacy or drug store. These medicines may have side-effects, too.

For instance, OTC pain killers may reduce or increase the effect of other medicines. Sometimes, specific foods react with medicines. Certain antibiotics are less effective if you drink milk while taking them.

▶ WHAT YOU CAN DO

What is important for the correct taking of your medicines and what part can you play?

The following tips are intended to assist you:

- Go and see your doctor regularly and talk to him. He is your main contact when you have problems or worries linked to the taking of your medicines. If new symptoms appear whilst taking a medicine, tell your doctor.
Let him know if you find it hard to swallow tablets, too.
- Ask your doctor if you still need to take all your medicines. Studies have shown that the fewer pills patients have to take, the better they are at taking them.
But don't stop taking any medicines without consulting your doctor.

▶ Safe Medical Treatment

▶ WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Keep a list of all the medicines you are taking – prescribed and OTC drugs. In this list you should include not only pills but also sprays, drops and ointments. Always keep an up-to-date list on you.
- If there is a set time for taking your medicines, be sure to stick to it. In the case of some medicines it is important that you take them before, during or after a meal. Your doctor or pharmacist can advise you.
- Make taking your medicines part of your daily routine. For instance, you could systematically take your medicines before brushing your teeth or after the evening news.
- Use little reminders. Set your alarm clock or your mobile phone. Or ask family members or other persons to remind you to take your medicine. Notes on the mirror or fridge may also be helpful.
- If you are dependent on medicines like insulin injections that are difficult to administer, ask your doctor about special training sessions.

▶ HELPFUL AIDS

Aids make it easier to take medicines and often they are not expensive.

If you have problems with your hands, for example stiff finger joints, then the following may be useful:

- pill extractors
- pill dividers
- medicine bottle openers
- dosing aids for eye drops

Patients with impaired vision may find the following helpful:

- magnifying glasses, for instances scaled magnifying glasses for insulin injections
- devices to facilitate the application of eye drops

To help with forgetfulness and provide a better overview, the following are suitable:

- pill organisers with daily or weekly sections - you can easily see whether you have taken a pill or not. They are also available with a sound reminder alarm.

▶ MORE INFORMATION

Subject: “Safe medical treatment”

A selection of validated information (in German) on the subject of “Safe medical treatment” can be sourced using the German search word “Arzneimittel” on:

www.patienten-information.de

Sources

The content of this information is based on the latest scientific research findings and on recommendations for patients from patients, and on a case study from the reporting and learning system network CIRS Berlin.

All the sources used can be accessed (in German) here:

www.patienten-information.de/kurzinformation-fuer-patienten/sichere-arzneimitteltherapie/quellen

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