



WHY DO ERRORS HAPPEN?

There are several factors that contribute to consumers taking the wrong prescription home. Some factors include the following:

- Stress and distraction—everyone, even pharmacists, can be distracted and stressed while on the job.
- Pharmacy workload—a high volume of prescriptions combined with time pressures.
- Economics—resulting in fewer pharmacists on duty
- Physician handwriting—a scrawled prescription can be misinterpreted.
- Pharmacy procedures—stocking drugs by manufacturer places look-alike packages in a row. Alphabetical arrangements put sound-alike products together.
- New drugs—it's difficult for pharmacists to keep up with the sheer volume of new medications. The number of drugs approved annually has doubled since the 1960s.

Connecticut Department of Consumer Protection

Prescription Monitoring Program

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Prescription Information for Consumers



Protecting Yourself from Prescription Errors

PICKING UP YOUR MEDS

Here are some tips on how to protect yourself against medication errors:

Open the bag at the counter. Check to be sure that you've been given what you should have.

Don't sign too quickly. The paper pushed across the counter—the one most of us sign automatically—is an agreement that you've gotten the information you need. Don't sign it without checking first.

Read the label carefully. Read every word. Check the name of the drug and directions for use. If the directions are unclear, ask the pharmacist to explain them. If the name on the label isn't the name of your doctor, notify the pharmacist.

Look at the drug. If it's a refill, does it look the same as the previous prescription? If not, ask the pharmacist.

Ask for printed information sheets. Ask the pharmacist if you need any additional counseling on the medication.



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UNDERSTANDING YOUR MEDS

At some time in our lives, we all have to go see a doctor, either for ourselves or a member of our family. Many times, the doctor will write a prescription, which may only be filled at a pharmacy.

Today there are more and more prescriptions being written and filled. Many times these prescriptions are difficult to read. The pharmacist works hard to make sure you get the right medicine prescribed by your doctor.

- To get the fullest benefit from your prescription, avoid problems, and reduce possible side effects, ask your doctor or pharmacist the following questions:
- What is the name of the medicine? What is it supposed to do?
- What is the dose of the medicine?
- Are there food, drinks, other medicines, or activities I should avoid while taking this medicine?
- What are the possible side effects of the medicine? What should I do if they occur?
- How long will I need to take the medication?

When you pick up your medicine at the pharmacy, check the label carefully to be sure it is the medicine you were prescribed by your doctor. And ask your pharmacist any questions you might have about the prescription.



FIRST-TIME PRESCRIPTIONS

When your doctor prescribes a medication for you for the first time, make sure to tell him or her the following:

- The names of all medicines you are currently taking, including both over-the-counter and prescription medication as well as any dietary supplements. It is important for your doctor to know this information in order to prescribe the medicine that will be the most helpful. (Keep a list of medicines and how to take them.)
- Any concerns you have about using your medication. For example, if cost is a concern there may be a generic drug or another lower cost medicine you can take.
- If you are allergic to any medication or have had troubling side effects from a medication that has been prescribed to you.
- Any illnesses or problems for which another doctor or health professional is treating you.



ASSESSING EFFECTIVENESS

During your treatment, you should schedule a follow-up visit to your doctor to monitor your progress. Make sure to tell him or her:

- About any problems you are having with your prescription.
- About any side effects or problems you have had since starting to take the prescription.
- About any new prescriptions that another doctor may have given you and any over-the-counter medicines or dietary supplements that you started taking since your last doctor's visit.
- How you are feeling since starting the medication.