

# “I have prescription medications in the house. How can I manage them and keep my family safe?”

**It's important to understand the medications you are taking, why your doctor prescribed them and how to secure them.**



## **Talk with your doctor and pharmacist**

Improper use of medications can cause many issues, including an ER visit or hospitalization. To minimize these risks, be sure to ask the following questions when your doctor prescribes a new medication for you:

- Why am I being prescribed this medication?
- How long will I be taking it?
- How often do I have to take it?
- What are the side effects?
- What side effects should be reported to my provider immediately?
- Is there potential for the new medication to interact with current medications or conditions?

Your pharmacist can also answer questions about proper dosage, potential side effects and any other special instructions.

## **Track your medications**

If you are on multiple prescriptions, it might be helpful to keep a list of the dose, frequency and the reason you are taking them. This list should also include any supplements, vitamins and over-the-counter medications you take regularly. This list will be helpful to you and your doctor if you have side effects, allergies or interactions with other drugs. A pill box can be helpful to organize your medications and help to make sure you don't miss a dose or double your dosage. Be sure to update this list regularly when a medication is added or stopped.

To check your medications for any adverse interactions, visit [fallonhealth.org](https://fallonhealth.org), and click Healthwise® Knowledgebase under “Quick links.” Then click the “Tools” tab and look for “Know Your Medicines.” This tool lets you find out if your medications react adversely with other drugs, foods or supplements.

If you're caring for an older friend or relative, you may have the responsibility of managing their medications. If they have Fallon Health, they may be able to use the Safe Transitions Program, which is offered to NaviCare®, Fallon Senior Plan™ and Summit ElderCare® members.

Safe Transitions is a post-discharge, in-home medication review program. When a member is discharged from a hospital, a skilled nursing facility or a rehabilitation facility, a pharmacist from Fallon will visit the member's home and evaluate their medications, make sure they are being taken properly and answer any other questions about their medications.

## Medication safety and children

Each year, thousands of children end up in the emergency room due to taking medications that were left unattended.

If you have young children, follow these safety tips:

- **Keep medications out of reach and store them properly.** Pick a cabinet the child can't reach. If this is not available, consider locking the medicines in a secure place. After taking your medication, always make sure the child safety cap is locked! Most medications should be stored in a dry area at room temperature, but some do require refrigeration. If you're storing your medications in a bathroom, the humidity in the bathroom can affect medication potency. Be sure to read the label or ask your pharmacist about proper storage.
- **Teach your kids about medications.** Tell them about the importance of taking medications when needed and prescribed, but also the dangers of taking them without adult supervision.
- **Be prepared for emergencies.** Keep the Poison Control phone number (1-800-222-1222) in your cell phone or on your refrigerator, so you can call right away if you suspect your child may have taken a medication not meant for them.
- **Safely throw away your medications.** If you have expired or unused medications in your home, be sure to dispose of them safely.
  1. Scratch out any personal information left on the empty container.
  2. Mix your medications with dirt, cat litter or coffee grounds.
  3. Place mixture in a sealable bag or container.
  4. Throw container in the trash.
- **Take advantage of Take Back Day.** Find a facility that will take your expired or unused medication and dispose of it for you. To find a Take Back location near you, go to [takebackday.dea.gov](http://takebackday.dea.gov).

## Prescription drug abuse

Prescription drug abuse is using a medication in a way that was not intended when it was prescribed. This can range from taking more pills than the dose requires, or using someone else's medication.

Any prescription drug can be abused, but the most common are:

- **Opioids**, like Vicodin and OxyContin. These drugs are prescribed to treat pain.
- **Anti-anxiety medications**, like Xanax and Valium.
- **Sedatives**, like Ambien, are prescribed to treat sleep disorders.
- **Stimulants**, like Ritalin and Adderall, are commonly prescribed to treat attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).
- **Muscle relaxants** when combined with other drugs.

When abused, each type of drug may show different symptoms, so it can be hard to identify. Look for certain behaviors:

- Mood swings
- Increase or decrease in sleep
- Seeking prescriptions from multiple doctors or claiming to "lose" prescriptions (so more have to be written)
- Asking for, or stealing, medications from others

If you suspect someone is abusing prescription drugs, help that person schedule an appointment with a health professional, who will determine the best treatment.

