

OASIS Alert

CLIP & SAVE ~ Improve Medication Management With This Patient Tip Sheet

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What You Need to Know about Medication Errors

A Fact Sheet for Patients and Their Family Members

One of the most common types of medical mistakes has to do with medication errors -- when patients take too many, too few, or the wrong pills. Medication errors can be very serious and lead to serious complications, admission to the hospital or even death. The good news is that patients and family members can help prevent medication errors.

Many medication errors occur at "transition points" such as when you enter the hospital, move from one room to another, or leave the hospital to go home.

These are some ways you can help prevent medication errors at these transition points:

Make a list of your medications: You can help prevent errors by knowing about all the medications you take. But this can be hard to do. To help, make a list of all your medications. Then bring this list each time you see a doctor or nurse. Your medication list should include:

- Names of all your medications (include over-the-counter and herbal remedies)
- Dosages (how much you take of each medication)
- Time (when you take each medication)
- Ways you take each medication (such as a pill, patch, or liquid)

Have up-to-date medication information: Make sure to keep your medication list up-to-date.

- Ask the doctor or nurse if your list includes all the medications you take now.
- Change the information on your list each time you start or stop taking a medication.
- Ask a pharmacist to review your medication list and make any needed changes.
- Make sure that the medications you are taking do not interact with one another. Ask your pharmacist for help if you aren't sure. You can also look on the Internet for Web sites that help you figure out what medications should not be taken together. One you may try is www.drugs.com.
- Try to use the same pharmacy for all your prescriptions and refills, so that your pharmacist can tell you about medications that you should not take at the same time.
- Throw away all medications you no longer take.

Ways to use a medication list:

- Bring your medication list each time you go to the hospital, emergency room, or clinic.
- If you are too sick to do so yourself, ask a family member to show the medication list to your doctors and nurses.
- Make sure your family has your doctor's name and phone number. This way, they can help the hospital staff find out what medications you take.
- When you leave the hospital, talk with the doctor or nurse about the medications you will take at home. This is also a good time to ask why you need to take these medications.

Source: Adapted from the Institute of Healthcare Improvement patient and family fact sheet at www.ihl.org/IHI/Programs/Campaign/Campaign.htm.