

EDUCATIONAL SERIES

PACKET #4

live well, work well

Health and wellness tips for your work, home, and life—
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Prescriptions

Taking an active role in your treatment

Taking your prescription isn't always as easy as swallowing a pill. It can involve many steps and decisions.

Understanding Your Meds

Take part in your treatment decisions. Do not be afraid to ask your doctor questions or talk about your concerns. The following are some points to cover each time you're prescribed a new medication:

- The risks and benefits
- The name of the medication and the effect it could have
- All the meds you are currently taking
- If cost is a concern
- Any medicine allergies
- If you are or might become pregnant or are breast-feeding
- Any illnesses or problems another doctor is treating you for

Selecting a Pharmacist

Your pharmacist is an important member of your health care team. He/She can help you understand your medications and how to take them safely and effectively. By keeping accurate and up-to-date records and monitoring your use of medications, he/she can help protect you from taking improper

medications, unwanted side effects, and dangerous drug interactions. Don't be afraid to talk to your pharmacist, who should be informed about your current condition and your medical history. He/she should also always be willing to answer any questions that you have regarding your medication, and should also be willing to contact your health care professional on your behalf if necessary. Here are some points to cover with your pharmacist each time you're picking up a new medication:

- How and when to take the medication, how much to take, and for how long
- What foods, drinks, other medicines, or activities you should avoid while taking this medication
- Any potential side effects
- What to do if you miss a dose
- Any concerns you have with taking this prescription

Other Talking Points

Here are some other issues and information to encourage proper communication with your doctor and pharmacist to help you make sure you are receiving the full benefits of your medication:

- If your medication has a generic version
- The medication's ingredients
- Help in setting up a system for taking your medication properly
- If the medication should be taken with food or on an empty stomach
- When you can expect the medication to begin working, and when you'll start feeling better



Did you know...?

It's important to get involved with your doctor and pharmacist before, during, and after taking a prescription, to give and get information, and to get help if you need it. By taking an active role, you'll get the full benefits the medication has to offer, avoid dangerous problems, and reduce your chances of having side effects.

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Taking New Medications

Points to remember

When your doctor prescribes a new medication for you, there are many things you should know about the drug itself, and how to take it properly. Mistakes can cause unnecessary reactions and problems – some even fatal.

Get the Information

When your doctor gives you a new prescription, ask him/her or your pharmacist the following questions:

- What is the name of the medication?
- Can a generic equivalent be substituted?
- What is the purpose of the drug?
- When and how should I take the drug?
- Are there any potential side effects?
- Are there any specific over-the-counter (OTC) or prescription drugs I should avoid while using this medication?

Other items you will want to discuss with your doctor include:

- Allergies you have to food or medicine
- Other medications you are taking (both OTC and prescription)
- Your medical history, including conditions such as diabetes, asthma, or depression
- If you are pregnant, plan to get pregnant, or are breastfeeding
- Your use of any drugs, alcohol, or tobacco

- Any vitamins, supplements, or diets you are on

Medication Instructions

Studies show that more than one-half of all prescription medications are taken incorrectly. Mistakes include:

- Taking the drug more frequently than directed
- Taking it past its expiration date
- Getting too many refills from more than one doctor
- Taking it with other medications not approved by the doctor
- Using someone else's prescription

To help avoid complications from mistakes or drug interactions, remember the following:

- Always give your doctor complete information about your symptoms.
- Always tell your doctor about any other drugs you are taking, including OTCs.
- Pay close attention to your doctor's instructions when he/she is prescribing a new medication; ask him/her to repeat the instructions if you are unsure of something.
- Always read the package insert before using any OTC.

- Report any unexpected side effects of a medication to your physician.

How to Read a Drug Label

When you have a prescription filled at your pharmacy, the label will generally include the following information:

- Drug name
- Dosage
- Type of medication (pills, liquid)
- Strength of the medication, shown in milligrams (mg)
- Number of refills available

It is also important to read the label on all OTC drugs, since you are taking them without instructions from a health care professional. Labels on OTCs include the following information:

- Ingredients
- Uses
- Warnings
- Instructions
- Information about potential negative interactions with certain foods or drugs



Did you know...?

To help consumers make informed decisions about the non-prescription medications they use (OTCs), the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) requires standard labels on all non-prescription drugs.

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Saving Money on Prescriptions

When it comes to prescription medication, you are likely familiar with the terms “generic” and “brand-name”. But do you know what a drug formulary is? Did you know that like a generic drug, it can also save you money? The following will help you understand the three.

Drug Formularies

If you belong to a health maintenance organization (HMO) or your employer offers its own health insurance plan, chances are it uses a prescription drug formulary to maximize the effectiveness of its pharmacy benefits program.

A formulary is essentially a preferred drug list for a particular health plan. The drugs on the formulary have been evaluated and researched for safety and effectiveness, and are often the most cost-effective versions of commonly-prescribed medications. By using a single set of prescribed medications for most routine treatments, health plans are able to provide high-quality care and keep costs as low as possible.

Formularies are not static lists; they change as new drugs and research become available. Usually, doctors and pharmacists review medical and pharmaceutical literature when deciding which drugs to place on a formulary. Some insurers allow variation from their formulary in

specific instances, while others charge members a much higher copayment for medications that do not appear on the formulary. Here is some basic information about a drug formulary:

- It is a comprehensive list of drugs expected to meet the needs of most patients.
- It is used as a way to provide cost-effective prescription drugs to members.
- It consists of both brand and generic drugs that have been approved by the health plan’s panel of physicians and pharmacists.
- It enhances the quality of medical care by identifying the best medicines from among the thousands of drugs now available. It is also a tool to help alleviate skyrocketing prescription drug costs.
- Formulary drugs are chosen for their safety, effectiveness, quality and cost.

To find out about your health plan’s formulary, talk to your company’s human resources representative.

Generic vs. Brand-Name

Some people think that generic

versions of their prescription drugs are inferior, but the FDA requires that generic drugs meet the same standards as their brand-name counterparts.

The difference between the two involves the research, development, and marketing investment that went into the original brand-name product, on which drug manufacturers spend millions of dollars. When “generic equivalents” – as they are often called – become available, they have the same active ingredients and chemical purity as the brand-name drugs they mimic. Other ingredients such as tablet fillers, binders, coatings, or flavors may differ. Because their development costs are less, generic drugs are often priced substantially lower.

When you receive a prescription from your doctor, ask if a generic equivalent is available. Many health plans charge a lower copay for patients who choose generics.



Did you know...?

The reason not every brand-name drug has a generic equivalent is because they are generally given patent protection for 20 years from the date of submission for the patent. This provides protection for the innovator that paid for the initial costs of the drug, including research, marketing, and development.

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Prescription Drug Abuse

A growing concern

Most Americans faithfully take their prescription medications as directed, but what happens when a patient finds it too difficult to stop taking the medication? Even worse, what about when prescriptions are deliberately taken for recreational purposes?

Epidemic on the Rise

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), a staggering 16.2 million Americans ages 12 and older took prescription medications for nonmedical purposes in 2006 (the most recent data available). A 2008 study reports that of the top 10 drugs used by high school seniors, seven are prescription or over-the-counter medications such as cough syrup. Over half of those who used prescription drugs got them from family or friends.

Drugs of Choice

The NIDA reports that the three classes of prescription drugs most commonly abused are opioids, most often prescribed for pain; central nervous system (CNS)

depressants (such as tranquilizers and sedatives), for anxiety and sleep disorders; and stimulants, used to treat narcolepsy and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Effects on the Body

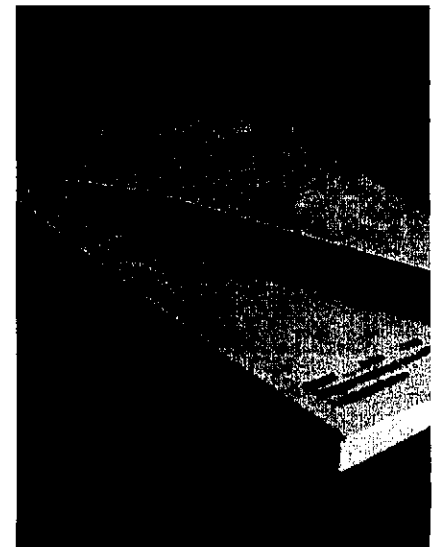
Each class of drugs affects the brain and body differently:

Opioids – When used correctly, they attach to opioid receptors, blocking the perception of pain. However, opioids such as OxyContin can also induce euphoria by affecting the brain regions that produce what is perceived as pleasure. This sensation is what causes people to become addicted. Short-term medical use of opioids rarely causes addiction. However, long-term users of the drug can experience severe respiratory depression which can lead to death.

CNS depressants – There are numerous CNS depressants, and most act by affecting the neurotransmitter called gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA). These drugs increase GABA activity, which produces a calming effect that is helpful to those suffering from sleep or anxiety disorders. If one

uses the drugs long-term due to addiction, the body will develop a tolerance and larger doses will be needed to produce the same results.

Stimulants – Once used to treat asthma and other respiratory problems, stimulants are now only prescribed for a treatment of a few conditions, due to their high abuse rate. Users experience a feeling of euphoria due to the increase of dopamine in the brain. Taking a high dose of a stimulant can result in a dangerously high body temperature, irregular heartbeat, cardiovascular failure or lethal seizures.



Causes

Experts are not entirely sure why prescription drug abuse continues to grow, but most agree that it is likely the availability of these medications. Doctors are writing prescriptions more than ever, and online pharmacies make it easy to obtain medications, even without a prescription.

Warning Signs

Unfortunately, many times abuse of prescription drugs is difficult to spot until a person is already deep into an addiction. Doctors may even have a hard time telling the difference between someone who is truly in extreme pain and a person who is just trying to get high. However, prescription drug abuse is likely present if a person exhibits the following signs:

- Receiving prescriptions from multiple doctors
- Stealing or forging prescriptions
- Constantly "misplacing" prescriptions so that more must be written
- Taking higher doses than recommended
- Buying medication from another person
- Selling prescriptions

Treatment and Prevention

Years of research have shown that addiction to any drug – illicit or prescribed – is a brain

disease that can be treated effectively. No single type of treatment is appropriate for everyone. Successful treatment methods have included detoxification, counseling, and pharmacological therapies.

While addictive behavior cannot always be prevented, there are some ways to be vigilant about staying on track with your prescriptions:

- Always follow medication directions carefully.
- Do not increase or decrease doses without first talking to your doctor.
- Do not stop taking medication on your own.
- Do not crush or break pills.
- Be clear about the drug's effect on driving and other daily tasks.
- Learn about the drug's potential side effects and interactions with alcohol and other medications.
- Inform your doctor if you have a past history of substance abuse.
- Do not use other people's prescriptions, and never share yours.
- Contact your doctor *immediately* if you feel you are becoming excessively dependent on the drug.

You can also help those who are addicted by following the federal prescription drug disposal guidelines:

- Take unused, unneeded, or expired prescription drugs out of their original containers.
- Mix the drugs with an undesirable substance like used coffee grounds and put them in nondescript containers like sealable bags, then throw in the trash.
- Flush prescription drugs down the toilet *only* if the accompanying patient information specifically instructs it is safe to do so.
- Return unused, unneeded or expired prescription drugs to pharmaceutical "take-back" locations that allow the public to bring unused drugs to a central location for safe disposal.

Getting Help

If you or someone you know may be suffering from prescription drug abuse, contact the Substance Abuse Treatment Facility Locator at **(800) 662-HELP** to find a substance abuse facility in your state.

Sources: Food and Drug Administration (FDA), National Institute on Drug Abuse, Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research

Did you know...?

Cough syrup is also a drug of choice for addicts, and it is even more readily available over-the-counter. Youths ages 12 to 17 are the primary abusers. The suppressant dextromethorphan (DXM) produces mind-altering effects, but when taken in excess, it can cause numbness, nausea or vomiting, increased heart rate and blood pressure, or even hypoxic brain damage.

EDUCATIONAL SERIES FOR CITY OF FINDLAY FITNESS STIPEND – PACKET #4

LIVE WELL, WORK WELL INFORMATION INCLUDED IN THIS QUESTIONNAIRE:

Prescriptions

Taking New Medications

Saving Money on Prescriptions

Prescription Drug Abuse

Please rate the statements below as either true or false

Circle One

- | | | | |
|----|---|------|-------|
| 1. | Your pharmacist is not an important member of your health care team. | True | False |
| 2. | Studies show that more than one-half of all prescription medications are taken incorrectly. | True | False |
| 3. | The FDA requires that generic drugs meet the same standards as their brand-name counterparts. | True | False |
| 4. | Years of research have shown that addiction to any drug is a brain disease that can be treated effectively. | True | False |

I have read the four Live Well, Work Well publications listed above.

Participant's Signature

Date