

Stay Safe By Talking With Your Pharmacist

Many people may not consult with their pharmacist before taking Tylenol® for a headache or Benadryl® for allergies, but when more than half of all insured Americans take at least one prescription medication that could interfere with common over-the-counter (OTC) medications, you might want to consider it.

As the most accessible health care provider, your pharmacist serves as the medication expert who is committed to ensuring your health and the safety and effectiveness of the medications that you take. Michigan Pharmacists Association encourages you to rely on your pharmacist's expertise to eliminate risks associated with common mistakes that patients make when taking different medications.

First, it is important to understand how pharmacist involvement impacts your care. Pharmacists are in nearly every community, including hospitals, long-term care settings and other medical institutions, ensuring that patients always have the opportunity to consult with them. Pharmacists help you manage all of your medication therapies, including OTC medications and herbal supplements, so that you get the most from your medications. This will help you better meet your health goals and reduce your health care costs! Your pharmacist also will help you be proactive about your health by providing immunizations and general health screenings for blood pressure, cholesterol levels, diabetes and other conditions.

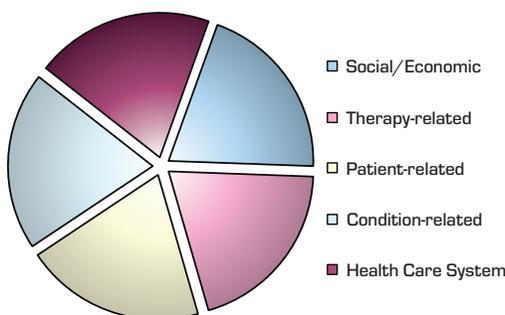
In a perfect world, patients would take medications in the right dose at the right time on the right day, and know not to take certain medications together. Unfortunately, this doesn't always happen. One medical article even states that if "nonadherence" were a disease, it would be an epidemic. So, what exactly does "medication nonadherence" mean?

According to the World Health Organization, medication nonadherence can include the following:

- Failing to initially fill or refill a prescription
- Forgetting one or multiple doses
- Taking more medication than was prescribed
- Prematurely discontinuing medication
- Taking a dose at an incorrect time
- Taking medication prescribed for someone else
- Taking medications with prohibited foods, liquids or other medications
- Taking medications that are expired, damaged or stored improperly
- Improperly using medication devices

Figure 1. Major Factors That Contribute to Medication Adherence

Social/Economic	Therapy-related	Patient-related	Condition-related	Health Care System
low literacy rate, medication cost, unstable living conditions	complexity of medication regimen, duration of therapy, medications with social stigma attached to use	visual impairment, cognitive impairment, psychosocial stress, anxiety, anger	chronic conditions, lack of symptoms, psychiatric disorders	provider-patient relationship, provider communication skills, no care continuity



The World Health Organization has determined five factors that contribute to a patient's struggle with medication adherence. Figure 1 shows each factor.

Constituting nearly 13 percent of total health care expenditures, medication nonadherence costs the United States \$290 billion annually and results in 125,000 preventable deaths every year. To reduce the costs associated with medication nonadherence and the risk of a hospital admission or death, patients should be aware of the crucial role that their pharmacist has in ensuring their safety.

Your pharmacist is your best resource for questions about prescriptions or OTC medications. As a patient, it is your responsibility to utilize the resources that pharmacists provide. Pharmacists understand that every patient has different needs, and they will be glad to help whenever you need it. Use the information and suggestions here to have a conversation with your pharmacist about how your medication is or isn't working, and what you can do to ensure your health.

Questions to ask your pharmacist

- What is the medicine for?
- How do I take it? How long do I take it?
- What are the possible side effects? What do I do if I experience them?
- Is this medicine safe to combine with other medicines or dietary supplements I am taking?
- What food, drink or activities should I stay away from while taking this medicine?

What you should know

- Pharmacists advise patients to maintain an accurate list of medications
- Patients should be aware of any allergies they have when taking certain medications
- Patients should know the names and dosages of their medications, as well as how to take them
- Patients should report any symptoms as soon as possible, even if they may be unrelated to the medication

As stated by Dr. C. Everett Koop, medications don't work in patients who don't take them. Additionally, you won't receive the best possible results from your medications if you don't understand what you're taking or why you're taking it. Have a conversation with your pharmacist today!

- article compiled by Allison Drake

For more information, ask your pharmacist!

This information is provided by Michigan Pharmacists Association and:

