

A Carers Guide to Managing Medicines

For unpaid carers of all ages



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Are you caring, **unpaid**, for a friend or family member who could not cope without your support? If you are regularly handling and giving them medication and feel unsure about doing this then this booklet is for you. It has been designed with carers to give more guidance about how and when to give medication safely. We've included a Consent form (see page 11) to make it easier for you to have that conversation with a member of the pharmacy team.

For the purposes of this booklet medication refers to any of the following: pills, tablets, liquid medicine taken by mouth, ointments, drops, injections.

We've used the term pharmacy in this booklet. Sometimes people refer to them as chemists.

When to give medication

This will depend on the medication but try and keep to the same time of day. It may help to put a reminder on your calendar or phone. If the person you care for has forgotten to take their medication and you're unsure when they need to take the next dose, ask your pharmacist/GP (family doctor). You can always give them a ring if it's difficult to visit.

How to give medication

Most oral medication should be swallowed with water. Read the label every time before you give or prompt medication to be taken to check that you have the right one and that you are following the instructions. Some medication must be taken at set times or before or after meals so that they work best.



Ordering and collecting repeat prescriptions

The way you order prescriptions, whether you collect them or have them delivered varies between different pharmacies and doctors' surgeries. The best way to ensure medication is ready when the person you care for needs it is to order it a week in advance. This will give the surgery enough time to make sure the prescription is ready. It's also important to only order the medication that the person you care for needs.

Buying medication

If the person you care for has a minor complaint and asks you to purchase any medicine from the pharmacy please always check with one of the pharmacy team if it is safe for them to do so with the medication that they currently take.



Safe storage and handling

All medication needs to be kept in the container it is supplied in and stored in a cool, dry place. Check the label to see if there are special arrangements for storage, for example, in a fridge. Make sure you always wash your hands before and immediately after giving medication.

Disposing of medications

Take any medication that the person you care for no longer needs, or is out of date, back to your local pharmacy; don't keep them "just in case". Don't throw them out with your normal rubbish or wash them down the sink or toilet.



Discharge from hospital

When the person you care for leaves hospital they will be eligible for a Discharge Medicine Review with their local community pharmacist. You can be part of this, with or on behalf of, the person you care for, with their consent. On leaving hospital you should be given a copy of the discharge medication sheet which you can take to your pharmacy once you get home. If you don't receive one please ask at the hospital before you leave. Every year thousands of people go back into hospital because of problems with their medication, so it's important this is checked. The review, with your local pharmacist, will check that all the medication is correct and that they have stopped taking any they no longer need. It will also explain what the medication does and how best to take it. If you or the person you care for are not able to get to the pharmacy you can have a confidential consultation with the pharmacist over the phone. If in doubt ask.

What can you expect from your local pharmacy

Medicine Use Reviews

The majority of pharmacists offer Medicines Use Reviews which will be conducted in private with the pharmacist. This is an opportunity for the person you care for to find out more about their medication and understand how they can get the best out of it, which you can ask to be part of. If the person you care for is on several different medications this is also a good time to discuss how the pharmacy can help to support you to make ordering simpler.

Additional services

Many pharmacies offer a range of services including delivery of medication, late night opening, flu vaccinations, inhaler advice, smoking cessation and advice on common ailments. A list of services offered should be signposted in the pharmacy but if in doubt ask.

Looking after you

Its important you take care of your own health as well as the person you care for. If you have questions either about your own medication or common ailments pharmacists can provide advice and support. Nearly all pharmacies have a private consultation room where they can hold private discussions. If you are not sure if your pharmacy has one, please ask. As a main carer, you may also be eligible for a flu vaccination (jab) either because of your own health or where you have a concern that getting flu may affect your ability to continue your caring role.

Collecting medication

You should be able to collect most medication from the pharmacy by giving the name and address of the person you care for but you may need proof of ID for some medication. If you are under 18, the pharmacist may want to ask you a few questions so explaining you care for someone will help.



Frequently asked questions

What do I do if the person I care for refuses to take their medication?

Try and get them to speak to their GP or pharmacist and explain why they don't want to take it, for example it may give them unwanted side effects, it might be difficult to swallow or have an unpleasant taste. Medication can sometimes be given in a different form which might make all the difference.

How often should medication be reviewed?

Usually once a year with a GP or practice nurse. You can also request a Medicine Use Review for the person you care for, with your pharmacist (see page 5).



Blister packs – what are they and how can I get them?

Blister packs are designed to help people remember to take their own medication. However not all medicines can be put into a blister pack and blister packs are not suitable for everyone. Your pharmacist will be able to advise if a blister pack would be suitable for the person you care for.

When I pick up repeat medication sometimes it has a different name and packaging. How do I know it's the same thing?

Sometimes it may just be a different brand of the same medication or the GP may have changed the medication following a review. If in doubt speak to one of the pharmacy team.

Young carers

Many young people have to pick up and, in some cases, help give medication (eg pills, tablets, liquid medicine taken by mouth, ointments, drops, injections) to a friend or family member who can't manage to do it on their own. If you are a young carer aged 18 and under and collecting and/or giving medication it is important that you do this safely.

Top tips

The pharmacist may need to make special arrangements for you to collect the medication if you are under 18.

It may make it easier if the person you are caring for contacts the pharmacy to let them know you are coming to collect medication for them.

It may make it easier to have the medication delivered to your home so it's worth asking at the pharmacy if this is possible.

Try to use the same pharmacy so they can get to know you. Tell the person in the pharmacy that you are a young carer. This will help and hopefully they can answer any questions you might have.

Please remember, if you have younger brothers or sisters please keep medicines where they can't reach or see them. It is especially important to put them away safe and secure once they have been taken.

Make sure you read the rest of this booklet for other help and advice.

If you can't get to a pharmacy, you can always give them a ring. There are useful contacts at the back that may also be helpful.



Questions you could ask the pharmacist

These are just suggestions.

- What does this medication do?
- How and when should it be taken?
- How do I/we know it's helping?
- What side effects are most likely from this medication?
- What should I/we do if these side effects happen?
- What if the person I care for stops taking it, or takes the wrong dose?
- How does this mix with other medication such as over the counter painkillers or indigestion tablets complementary and herbal remedies, or with food and drink?
- Will the medication build up in the body?
- Do they really need to take all this medication?
- Is there anything that can help to remind the person I care for to take their medication?
- Can the medication come in any other form, for example as a liquid (this can sometimes be arranged for example, if the person you care for has difficulty swallowing tablets)?
- Is it possible to make the medication label large print to make it easier to read?
- If you want to ask questions linked to a mental health problem your pharmacist will always be happy to discuss them. One in four people will have a mental health issue at some time in their life so health professionals are quite used to talking about them.

Your useful contacts numbers

Name

Number

GP:

Pharmacy:.....

District nurse:.....

Other:

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Useful contacts

NHS Direct Wales:
0845 46 47

Out of Hours Service:
Outside normal surgery hours you can still phone your GP surgery, but you will usually be directed to an out-of-hours service between 6.30pm and 8.00am.

When the pharmacy is closed, for advice on any health problem and details of other health services, contact your out-of hours GP or NHS Direct Wales for health information and nurse advice. If you or the person you care for urgently need medical help that is critical or life-threatening, call 999 immediately.

Local Carers Services

For details of your local carers services contact either your Local Authority, your Local Health Board or Carers Trust Wales for Advice, Information, support and respite services.

Carers Trust Wales

Email: wales@carers.org
Tel: 02920 090087

Useful websites

- Carers Trust Wales
www.carerstrust.wales
- NHS Direct Wales
www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk
- Patient services
www.patient.co.uk
- Community Pharmacy Wales
www.cpwales.org.uk





Consent form

It will make it easier for your pharmacist to talk to you about the medication the person you care for is taking if they:

- know you are a carer
- have written consent from the person you care for. The consent form below has been designed to make the process easier for you. Please ask the person you care for to complete the slip below. You can hand it into your local pharmacy where they will keep it for future reference.

Patient name.....

Patient address.....

I agree that the pharmacist may discuss information regarding the medication and/ or appliances I am prescribed and how I take them with

Name

Contact

Acting in their capacity as my carer.

I understand I can withdraw my consent at any time, but I must notify the pharmacist if I wish to do this.

Declaration

Patient signature:

Date:





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