



# Know your medicines

An **A to Z** on what you need to know about your medications

BY DAVID WOO



**MEDICATION** is a double-edged sword – it has the power not only to heal but also to hurt. Only by taking medication correctly can you expect the medication to treat the condition. Inappropriate use of medication may not only reduce its intended benefit but also increase the risk for unwanted side effects, and as a result, may cause complications and even hospitalisation. So, here are some A to Z tips to remember before popping that pill into your mouth:

**A Ask** questions if you don't understand. Knowing your medical condition and treatment will help you to maximise the benefits and minimise the risks of your medications.

**B Be** cautious when taking two or more non-prescription or over-the-counter medications, such as cold and flu products, at one time. With many manufacturers producing similar products, compare the products to see if they contain the same medication before taking them.

**C Create** a partnership with your pharmacist to help you work towards a healthier you.

Your pharmacist can help you to understand and monitor your treatment and medications.

**D Discard** any expired medications. Potential harm may come to you if you consume any expired medications or supplements.

**E Experiencing** a problem with your medication? Talk to your doctor or pharmacist and let him know immediately.

**F Fill** your prescriptions at the same pharmacy. By doing this, the pharmacist can continually check for potential allergies and drug interactions, and review your medication record to help you monitor your condition.

**G Get** active in your own health. Learn about your medical conditions, medications and treatment. Learn more about yourself. Take control of your health.

**H Help** is just a phone call away. If you feel that you've taken any medication incorrectly, contact your doctor, pharmacist or the Drug & Poison Information Centre Hotline at 6423 9119.

**I Inspect** your medication before taking it, especially if it hasn't been taken for a long time or stored improperly. Check the appearance, colour and for the presence of an odour. If in doubt, do not take it and check with the pharmacist or doctor.

**J Just** remember that taking medications properly, and as instructed, has the power to heal. Taking medications incorrectly has the power to hurt.

**K Keep** a list of your current allergies, and medications and supplements with you at all times. This list is an important source of your medical and medication history for doctors and pharmacists. It is also especially important in emergency situations when you are unable to communicate.

**L Look** for non-prescription medications that will treat only the symptoms you have. Some non-prescription medications have other ingredients that may not only be of no benefit but also have potential side effects.

**M Monitor** the progress of your treatment and condition



regularly. Sometimes, your medical condition may change in between clinic visits. With regular self-monitoring, these changes can be detected early for appropriate treatment.

**N Never** purchase more medication than what you need for the next clinic visit. Excess medication may not only lose its effectiveness if not stored properly but also be wasted if there's a change in therapy before the excess medication is finished.

**O Only** combine different medications into one container if the container is a pillbox reminder. Combining medications in other containers may cause confusion and hence, result in taking medications improperly.

**P Pharmacists** are available to help you with your healthcare needs. They are trained not only to give health advice and information on your medications, supplements and other health needs, but also to help you monitor your condition and treatment.



**Q Questions** can be asked of your doctor or pharmacist. If there's something you would like to know about your medications, please ask.

**R Read** your prescription labels carefully. Understanding and following the prescription label will ensure that you are taking your medications correctly. If the label is not clear, ask to have the label reprinted.

**S Store** your medications correctly. Improper storage may lead to reduced effectiveness of the medication – most medications should be stored in a cool (i.e. room temperature), and dry place away from direct heat and sunlight. Be aware that only certain medications need special storage conditions, like the refrigerator.



**T Take** ownership. Be proactive in maintaining your health – it is your health and life, after all.

**U Understand** the proper technique in using medication devices, such as eye drops and inhalers. Knowing the proper technique will make sure that you get the maximum benefit of the medication.

**V Verify** what you are given by the doctor or pharmacist. Repeat back what you are told to make sure you understand your medication and how to take it.

**W When** in doubt, ask your pharmacist before you buy non-prescription medications and supplements.

**X Xmas/Christmas** or any holiday trips you make, be sure to bring your medication and make sure you have enough for the days you will be away. Bring extra if need be.

**Y You** should not share your medications with others. Medications prescribed are intended to treat only your conditions – what may help you may, in turn, harm another.

**Z Zap** away your condition for good by making sure you finish the full course of the prescribed medication, especially antibiotics. Just because you may feel better, your condition could return if you don't complete the full course of antibiotics.

Being proactive in your own healthcare will only benefit you in the long term as you learn to take control of your health instead of your health controlling you. With time and patience, by learning more about your own health and how to take care of it, you will be able to make better-informed, health-related decisions. And one aspect of this is learning to take your medications safely and effectively. **P**

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