

# A Carers Guide to Managing Medicines



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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 to give more guidance about how and when to give medicines safely.

We've included a Consent form (see page 11) to make it easier for you to talk to the pharmacist about the medicines the person you care for is taking.

For the purposes of this booklet medicines refer to any of the following – pills, tablets, liquid medicine taken by mouth, ointments, drops, creams, inhalers and injections.

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



## When to give medicines

This will depend on the medicine 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 medicine and you're unsure when they need to take the next dose, ask your pharmacist or GP. You can always give them a ring if it's difficult to visit.

## How to give medicines

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

Make sure you always wash your hands before and after giving medication.

## Ordering repeat prescriptions

Speak to a member of the pharmacy team about the best way to ensure prescriptions are ready when the person you care for needs them. It is also important to only order medicines that the person you care for needs.

## Collecting medicines

You should be able to collect most medicines from the pharmacy by giving the name and address of the person you care for but you may need proof of ID for some medicines. If you are under 18, the pharmacist may query this so explaining you care for someone will help. It may make it easier if the person you are caring for contacts the pharmacy to let them know you are collecting their medicines for them.

## Buying medicines

If the person you care for has a minor illness and asks you to purchase a medicine from the pharmacy, always check with one of the pharmacy team if it is safe for them to take that medicine with the medicines they currently take.

## Safe storage

All medicines need to be kept in the container they are 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. Keep all medicines out of the reach and sight of children.

## Disposing of medicines

Take any medicines 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.

## NHS New Medicine Service

When a person is prescribed a medicine to treat long-term conditions for the first time, the pharmacist will support them to use the medicine safely and to best effect.

The pharmacist will talk to the person approximately two weeks after they first receive the medicine to see how they are getting on with it and to discuss any problems they may have. A second follow-up discussion will occur about a month after they first receive the medicine. The first and the second follow up can either happen face-to-face or on the telephone.

This free service is only available to people using certain medicines. A member of the pharmacy team will give you details and offer this free NHS service, if this is available to you or the person you care for. Currently, this service can only be provided to the patient but with their consent, you could sit in/listen in on the discussion to learn more about the new medicine the person you care for is taking.

## NHS Medicines Use Review Service

This is a medicine check-up service, which is useful if the person you care for regularly takes several prescription medicines or is on medicines for a long-term illness. This free NHS service will help the person to find out more about their medicines, identify any problems they may be having with them and help them to take their medicines to best effect.

Currently, this service can only be provided to the patient but with their consent you could sit in on the discussion to learn more about the medicines the person you care for is taking.

### Additional services

Many pharmacies offer a range of services including delivery of medicines, 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

It's important you take care of your own health as well as the person you care for. If you have questions either about your own medicines or common ailments, pharmacists can provide advice and support. Nearly all pharmacies have a consultation room for private discussions.

### Flu vaccinations

As a main carer you may also be eligible for a flu vaccination either because of your own health or where you have a concern that getting flu may affect your ability to continue your caring role.

## Frequently asked questions

### **What do I do if the person I care for refuses to take their medicines?**

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. Medicines can sometimes be given in a different form which might make all the difference.

### **How often should medicines be reviewed?**

Usually once a year with a GP or practice nurse. You can also request a Medicines Use Review for the person you care for, with their pharmacist.

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

Blister packs are designed to help people remember to take their own medicines. 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 medicines 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 medicine or the GP may have changed the medicine following a review. If in doubt, speak to one of the pharmacy team.



## Young carers

If you are a young carer aged 18 or under and collecting and/or giving medicines it is important that you do this safely.

### Top tips

The pharmacist may need to make special arrangements for you to collect the medicines 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 medicines for them.

It may make it easier to have the medicines 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 keep medicines where they can't reach or see them. It is especially important to put them away safely and securely once they have been taken.

You can 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 medicine do?
- How and when should it be taken?
- How do I/we know it's helping?
- What side effects are most likely from this medicine and what should I/we do if these side effects happen?
- Will the medicine build up in the body?
- Do they really need all this medicine?
- Is there anything that can help to remind the person I care for to take their medicines?
- Does the medicine 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 medicine label large print to make it easier to read?



# Your useful contacts numbers

GP name

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GP number

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Pharmacy name

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Pharmacy number

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District nurse name

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District nurse number

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Other useful numbers

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## Useful contacts

### About Carers Trust

Carers Trust is a major new charity for, with and about carers. We work to improve support, services and recognition for anyone living with the challenges of caring, **unpaid**, for a family member or friend who is ill, frail, disabled or has mental health or addiction problems.

We do this with Network Partners – a unique network of 116 independent carers centres, 55 Crossroads Care schemes and 99 young carers services. Together we are united by a shared vision for carers – to make sure that quality assured information, advice and practical support are available to all carers across the UK.

### Carers Trust

Email: [info@carers.org](mailto:info@carers.org)

Tel: 0844 800 4361

- [Carers.org](http://Carers.org)
- [babble.carers.org](http://babble.carers.org)  
(for carers under 18)
- [matter.carers.org](http://matter.carers.org)  
(for carers aged 16–25)

### Your local carers service(s):

Enfield Carers Centre  
Britannia House  
137-143 Baker Street  
Enfield  
EN1 3JL

Tel: 020 8366 3677

Email: [info@enfieldcarers.org](mailto:info@enfieldcarers.org)  
[www.enfieldcarers.org](http://www.enfieldcarers.org)

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 111. Call 111 if you or the person you care for urgently need medical help but it's not a life-threatening situation. If it is a life threatening situation, call 999 immediately.



## Consent form

It will make it easier for your pharmacist to talk to you about the medicines 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's name

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Patient's address

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

Name

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Contact

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Who is 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.

Patient's signature

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Date

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