Use Medications As Directed

Why do we misuse our medications? Ignoring the directions? Some people feel they can't afford them and therefore don't even get them filled. Or we cut them in half to make them last longer. Others save leftovers just in case they're needed later.

We have a casual attitude about warnings on the bottle. *("I mean, don't ALL drugs say they'll make you drowsy?"*) We stop taking them before we're supposed to because we think we feel better.

We get things mixed up, especially if we're taking several prescription drugs on a regular basis or take the drugs out of their original containers.

And many of us don't read or understand the information that accompanies the medication.

Understandable? Yes. But this issue of not taking medications as directed – called non-adherence – can pose some serious health and safety risks. Here are some tips for using medications as directed:

1. Read the label on the bottle including
    - the name, address and phone number of the dispenser or pharmacy
    - the drug name, strength, and quantity
    - directions for use – including any precautions
    - the beyond-use date

2. Read the information that accompanies the medications to learn even more about the drug including
    - what the drug looks like
    - how and when to use it (e.g., with or without food, time of day)
    - what side effects might occur
    - what to do if you miss a dose
    - how to store the medication
    - how it might interact with alcohol and other drugs
    - and what to do if you suspect there's been an overdose

3. Ask your health care provider before increasing or decreasing your dose, or before deciding to stop taking it early.

4. Respect the warnings, especially as they relate to driving and other safety sensitive tasks and consuming with alcohol or other drugs.

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5. Alert your health care provider if anything changes with your health that might warrant an adjustment to your medications (e.g., if you are or wish to become pregnant).

6. Keep your medications in their original containers. (With caution, a pill box may be used to help track your medication schedule.)

7. Talk to your health care provider or your pharmacist if you can't afford the medication.

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