

Check-out checklist: Managing your medications after you leave the hospital

In a recent study in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, half of patients experienced one or more medication errors during the first month after discharge from the hospital—23 percent were serious and 2 percent were life-threatening. Reduce your chance of a drug error and the possibility of being re-admitted to the hospital by following the steps below.

1 Get a discharge list of medication. Ask about drugs you started in the hospital that you should continue when you get home, including their purpose and side effects, and if you should resume or eliminate drugs you were on before your admission. If you had anesthesia, ask what lingering side effects you might experience. Also ask your doctor if you can stop taking any of your medications after you feel better.

2 Review your full drug list with your doctor. That includes prescription and over-the-counter drugs, as well as vitamins, minerals, herbs, and other dietary supplements you took before you were admitted. Ask if you can still take these after your discharge, and if there are any interactions with medications you started taking in the hospital and will continue to take after discharge. Make a copy of your updated drug list; keep one for yourself and give the other to a family member, helper, or caregiver.

3 Bring up cost. If price is a concern, ask your doctor if there is another medication or generic version that costs less and will work the same.

4 Make sure you can read any new prescriptions. If you can't, a pharmacist might not be able to either. So ask the doctor for a legible one, and make sure it



includes the drug's brand and generic names, directions for use, and what the medication is being prescribed for directly on the prescription.

5 Check your prescriptions before you leave the pharmacy. Does the prescription label look different than what you expected? Does a refill have a different shape, color, or size than what you were given before? If so, ask the pharmacist to double-check it right away. Also, read and save the patient information that comes with your medication.

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