



Tien-Shu (Sunny) Miao, PharmD, December 2022



- It is important to take your medications as instructed by your prescriber or pharmacist.
- Medication instructions are listed on your medication bottles.
- If you are unsure when to take your medications, experiencing negative side effects, or have any questions please contact your prescriber or pharmacist.

It is important to take prescription and over the counter (OTC) medications as instructed by your prescriber or pharmacist. The medication bottle will have instructions for each medication including when to take it, how many pills to take, and how many times it should be taken. The bottle may also tell you if the medication needs to be taken with food. Talk with your pharmacist if you have any questions about your medications. Taking medications as prescribed is important for many reasons; two major reasons are:

- To make sure the medications work properly
- To reduce unwanted side effects

When to Take Medication

Since your body performs different tasks in the morning than it does at night, taking medications at specific times can maximize their effects.¹ For example, medications used to improve sleep are typically taken at bedtime to follow the body's natural rhythm. Medications that can cause wakefulness are typically taken in the morning to avoid difficulty sleeping.

A person's schedule helps determine the best time of day to take a medication. It is important to discuss your specific schedule with your prescriber or pharmacist.

How to Reduce Side Effects

Side effects are secondary reactions to medications, which may be positive or negative. Negative side effects, like constipation and nausea, are also called adverse effects. Someone who has a poor appetite may consider weight gain to be a positive side effect, while someone who wants to lose weight may consider it a negative side effect. Some side effects are temporary until your body becomes adjusted to a new medication.

Side Effect vs Adverse Effect – most of the time people use these phrases to mean the same thing. A side effect can be positive or negative. Sometimes, medications are used for their positive side effects. For instance, trazodone is an antidepressant, but it may cause sleepiness and is sometimes used as a sleep medication for people with problems sleeping. An adverse effect is typically an unwanted, negative side effect like confusion, falls, or seizures.

The time of day that medications are taken can decrease the impact of side effects on daily activities. Some medications can cause headaches or stomach upset. If you experience either of these side effects, taking the medication at bedtime could reduce the burden of these effects since you are less likely to notice them while asleep.

If you have any bothersome side effects, please contact your prescriber or pharmacist to discuss ways to manage them. For example, if a medication causes constipation, your provider might suggest changes to your diet or a medication to treat constipation. Please talk with your prescriber or pharmacist before stopping your medications, as some medications can cause additional side effects if they are stopped suddenly. Call 911 immediately for life-threatening side effects like problems with breathing, throat swelling, or chest pain.

Medications to Take with Food

Two important reasons your prescriber or pharmacist may recommend taking a medication with food include:

1. To make sure the medication is absorbed properly
2. To decrease the risk of negative side effects, such as stomach upset and diarrhea

Certain medications need to be taken with food to be fully absorbed in your body.² If a medication is not fully absorbed, it may not work as well as it should. Meanwhile, other medications may need a more acidic environment to be absorbed. Taking these types of medications on an empty stomach is better as the stomach becomes less acidic in the presence of food. This information is sometimes listed on the medication bottle. Please let your pharmacist know if any instructions on your medication bottles are hard to see, read, and/or understand. It is important to discuss any questions with your prescriber or pharmacist to ensure you are getting the full benefit of your medications.

Additional Resources

- <https://www.fda.gov/drugs/information-consumers-and-patients-drugs/think-it-through-managing-benefits-and-risks-medicines>
- <https://www.fda.gov/consumers/womens-health/use-medicines-wisely>



Go online to find more information and to view the references for this toolkit.

aapp.org/555645

Important Disclosure: This information is being provided as a community outreach effort of the American Association of Psychiatric Pharmacists. This information is for educational and informational purposes only and is not medical advice. This information contains a summary of important points and is not an exhaustive review of information about the topic. Always seek the advice of a physician or other qualified medical professional with any questions you may have regarding medications or medical conditions. Never delay seeking professional medical advice or disregard medical professional advice as a result of any information provided herein. The American Association of Psychiatric Pharmacists disclaims any and all liability alleged as a result of the information provided herein.