

Your Health: How to Monitor Your Medicines



Medicines are a big part of treatment for many health problems. They fight harmful bacteria, relieve pain, and save lives. Medicines have helped cure diseases that used to have no cure.

But you have to monitor, or watch, some medicines more closely than others. This means working with your doctor to be sure a medicine is not harming you and that you are getting the right dose.

Why do you need to monitor medicines?

Monitoring your medicines helps you and your doctors to:

- Be sure you are getting the right dose for your gender, age, and weight.
- Be sure the medicine is working for you.
- Avoid interactions with other medicines. An interaction is a bad reaction that happens when you take certain medicines together. Some interactions can cause a trip to the emergency room or hospital.
- Avoid damage to your heart, kidneys, liver, or other organs.

Which medicines do you need to monitor?

Most medicines can be monitored with your doctor's help.

Common medicines that you may need to monitor include:

- ACE inhibitors. These medicines lower blood pressure, treat heart failure, and prevent heart attacks and strokes. Examples include benazepril, fosinopril, and lisinopril.
- Angiotensin II receptor blockers. These lower blood pressure and treat heart failure. Examples include losartan, olmesartan, and valsartan.
- Anticonvulsants. These help prevent or control seizures and can help manage chronic pain. Examples include carbamazepine, phenytoin, and valproic acid.
- Digoxin. This medicine helps control heart rate.
- Diuretics. These reduce the amount of fluid in the body and lower blood pressure. Examples include chlorthalidone, furosemide, and hydrochlorothiazide.
- Statins. Statins lower cholesterol levels. Examples include atorvastatin, lovastatin, and simvastatin.

How do you monitor medicines?

Your doctor will tell you which medicines need to be monitored and how it will be done.

Your doctor may do a physical exam, ask you how your symptoms are, and do a blood test. A blood test can check the level of medicine in your blood, find out how well the medicine is working, or check how the medicine is affecting some of your organs.

If a blood test is used, your doctor will take a sample of blood and have it tested. The timing of this test depends on the medicine your doctor is checking. For example, you may have a test before you take your medicine. Or you may have to fast and have the blood test in the morning.

Ask your doctor for instructions about the timing of the test.

When to call a doctor

Call your doctor if:

- Side effects from a medicine bother you.
- You think you are having a medicine interaction.
- You have any questions about your medicines.

Questions to ask your doctor

List your questions or concerns below. Take this sheet with you to your next doctor visit.

Questions about monitoring medicines: