

... OCTOBER 2008 ...

**QUICK TAKES**



**Talk to Your Pharmacist**

The more information you have, the better able you will be to use your medications correctly, prevent errors, and protect your health.

Check with your pharmacist about:

- When and how you should take your medication
- What to do if you miss a dose
- Any potential side effects
- How your medications might interact with other drugs you are taking
- How to safely dispose of unused medications.

**Check Your Medicines**

Doctors, nurses, and pharmacists work hard to keep you healthy, but unfortunately, medication errors occasionally occur. The more information you have, the better able you are to prevent errors and take care of yourself. Below are five simple tips for using medicines safely.

**1. Bring a list or a bag with ALL your medicines when you go to your doctor's office, the pharmacy, or the hospital.** Include all prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements that you use. If your doctor prescribes a new medicine, ask if it is safe to use with your other medicines. Remind your doctor and pharmacist if you are allergic to any medicines.

**2. Ask questions about your medicines. Ask questions and make sure you understand the answers.** Choose a pharmacist and doctor you feel comfortable talking with about your health and medicines. Take a relative or friend with you to ask questions and to remind you about the answers later. Write down answers.

**3. Make sure your medicine is what the doctor ordered.** Does the medicine seem different than what your doctor wrote on the prescription, or does it look different than what you expected? Does a refill look like it is a different shape, color or size than what you were given before? If something seems wrong, ask the pharmacist to double check it. Most errors are first found by patients.

**4. Ask how to use the medicine correctly.** Read the directions on the label and any handouts you receive when you pick up your prescription. Have the pharmacist or doctor explain anything you do not understand. Are there other medicines, foods, or activities (such as driving, drinking alcohol, or using tobacco) that you should avoid while using the medicine? Ask if you need lab tests to check how the medicine is working or to make sure it doesn't cause harmful side effects.

**5. Ask about possible side effects.** Side effects can occur with many medicines. Ask your doctor or pharmacist what side effects to watch for and which ones are serious. Some side effects may bother you but will get better after you have been using the medicine for awhile. Call your doctor right away if you have a serious side effect or if a side effect does not get better. A change in the medicine or the dose may be needed.

Taking an active role in making decisions about your health can improve your care, and simple checks could save your life.

# Talking with Your Doctor: Quick Tips

The single most important way you can stay healthy is to be an active member of your own health care team. Patients who have good relationships with their doctors tend to be more satisfied with their care. Here are some tips to help you and your doctor become partners in improving your health care.

## Give Information. Don't Wait to Be Asked!

- You know important things about your symptoms and your health history. Tell your doctor what you think he or she needs to know.
- It is important to tell your doctor personal information — even if it makes you feel embarrassed or uncomfortable.
- Bring a "health history" list with you, and keep it up to date. You might want to make a copy of the form for each member of your family.
- Always bring any medicines you are taking, or a list of those medicines (include when and how often you take them) and what strength. Include prescription as well as over-the-counter drugs. Talk about any allergies or reactions you have had to your medicines.
- Tell your doctor about any herbal products you use or alternative medicines or treatments you receive.

## Get Information

- Ask questions. If you don't, your doctor may think you understand everything that was said.
- Write down your questions before your visit. List the most important ones first to make sure they get asked and answered.

- You might want to bring someone along to help you ask questions. This person can also help you understand and/or remember the answers.
- Ask your doctor to draw pictures if that might help to explain something.
- Let your doctor know if you need more time. If there is not time that day, perhaps you can speak to a nurse or physician assistant on staff. Or, ask if you can call later to speak with someone.

## Take Information Home

- Ask for written instructions.
- Your doctor also may provide brochures, videotapes or links to Websites that can help you. If not, ask how you can get such materials.

## Once You Leave the Doctor's Office, Follow Up

- If you have questions, call.
- If your symptoms get worse, or if you have problems with your medicine, call.
- If you had tests and do not hear from your doctor, call for your test results.
- If your doctor said you need to have certain tests, make appointments at the lab or other offices to get them done.
- If your doctor said you should see a specialist, make an appointment.

Source: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ)

## Baked Apples

Makes: 4 Servings | Takes 40 - 50 Minutes

If you like, serve the warm apples with a small scoop of low-fat frozen vanilla yogurt or ice cream. Or serve them chilled on their own.

### Ingredients

4 large firm apples (such as Cortland, Fuji or Golden Delicious)  
¼ cup apple cider or apple juice  
2 tablespoons brown sugar  
½ teaspoon ground cinnamon  
¼ teaspoon ground ginger  
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

### Preparation

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. Core apples leaving bottoms intact. Remove a strip of apple peel from around the top to prevent skins from bursting. Place in a dutch oven or baking dish.
3. In a small bowl, combine brown sugar, cinnamon, ginger and vanilla. Pour over and around the apples. Cover and bake until the apples are soft but hold their shape, 30-40 minutes. Serve warm, spooning the warm sauce over them.

(Photo Source: ©Ellen Silverman/Matria Healthcare)



**Nutrition Facts:** Per Serving – 131 Calories, 0.5g Fat, 0.1g Saturated fat, 0g Trans Fat, 0.3g Protein, 30g Carbohydrate, 4g Fiber, 10mg Sodium