



Consumers Can Help Prevent Harmful Medication Incidents

## SafeMedicationUse.ca Newsletter

Volume 7 • Issue 7 • September 20, 2016

### 5 Questions to Ask about Your Medications

Do you know what questions to ask about your medications? Knowing which medications, if any, have changed and how to take all your medications properly can help you to avoid serious problems. Ask the right questions to stay safe.

SafeMedicationUse.ca recently received a report highlighting the importance of asking your healthcare providers the right questions about your medications. A consumer undergoing cataract surgery was given prescriptions for two different eye drops: an antibiotic (ciprofloxacin) and a corticosteroid (prednisolone). Both eye drops were to be used for a few days up to and including the day of surgery, but only the antibiotic eye drop was to be continued after the surgery.

Following the surgery, the consumer mistakenly continued taking the corticosteroid eye drop and stopped taking the antibiotic eye drop. The instructions for using the eye drops were provided on a sheet of paper at an appointment 3 months before the operation, but after the surgery, the consumer's reduced vision prevented her from reading it. After using the wrong eye drop for 4 days, she experienced redness and discomfort in her eyes, and then a family member noticed the error. Although using the wrong eye drop in this case did not seem to affect the overall outcome of the surgery, it did lead to extra doctor visits and caused the patient discomfort and worry.

**SafeMedicationUse.ca recommends starting a conversation with your healthcare provider by asking 5 specific questions (outlined below) in each of the following situations:**

- during appointments with your doctors, including specialists, your optometrist, and your dentist
- before discharge from a hospital
- when you pick up your prescriptions from the pharmacy
- during home care visits

**5 QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT YOUR MEDICATIONS**  
when you see your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist.

- 1. CHANGES?**  
Have any medications been added, stopped or changed, and why?
- 2. CONTINUE?**  
What medications do I need to keep taking, and why?
- 3. PROPER USE?**  
How do I take my medications, and for how long?
- 4. MONITOR?**  
How will I know if my medication is working, and what side effects do I watch for?
- 5. FOLLOW-UP?**  
Do I need any tests and when do I book my next visit?

Keep your medication record up to date.

Remember to include:

- ✓ drug allergies
- ✓ vitamins and minerals
- ✓ herbal/natural products
- ✓ all medications including non-prescription products

Ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist to review all your medications to see if any can be stopped or reduced.

Visit [safemedicationuse.ca](http://safemedicationuse.ca) for more information.

Logos for ismp, cpsp/cpsp, Canadian Society of Hospital Pharmacists, Canadian Pharmaceutical Association, and SafeMedicationUse.ca are included at the bottom.

## 1. Changes?

*Have any medications been added, stopped or changed, and why?*

- Not understanding changes to your medications can lead to mistakes and possible harm.
- Asking this question after the surgery might have helped the consumer to determine which eye drop was to be stopped.

## 2. Continue?

*What medications do I need to keep taking, and why?*

- Continuing prescribed medications is important to get all the benefits your doctor intended.
- Asking this question after the surgery might have helped the consumer to determine which eye drop was to be continued.

## 3. Proper Use?

*How do I take my medications, and for how long?*

- Knowing how to use your medications properly will allow you to get their full benefit.
- Asking how long the eye drops were to be used might have prompted staff at the eye clinic to review the instructions for each eye drop.

## 4. Monitor?

*How will I know if my medication is working, and what side effects do I watch for?*

- Understanding what a medication is supposed to do can help you to understand whether it is working properly and when you can expect to notice an improvement. At the same time, you can also ask about possible side effects.
- Knowing that the antibiotic was intended to prevent infection, and knowing that redness and discomfort could be signs of an infection, might have prompted the consumer to contact the surgeon or clinic sooner than the scheduled follow-up appointment.

## 5. Follow-up?

*Do I need any tests, and when do I book my next visit?*

- Follow-up tests and appointments may be needed to check how well your medications are working for you. When you are discharged from hospital, it is a good idea to book a follow-up appointment with your family doctor within 7 days.
- In our example, the consumer already had a follow-up appointment scheduled after the surgery. She would have an opportunity to ask about further tests at that time.

Watch this [video](#) to learn more, or download the handout/poster: [“5 Questions to Ask about Your Medications”](#)

Share a story of how the 5 questions to ask about your medications have helped make a difference or take a photo of where you've seen the poster and send us a message at [medrec@ismp-canada.org](mailto:medrec@ismp-canada.org). We appreciate hearing from you.

## Medication safety bulletins contribute to Global Patient Safety Alerts

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