



Consumers Can Help Prevent
Harmful Medication Incidents

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Know When Your Medicine Should Be Stopped!

It is important to know when to stop taking a medicine. Some medicines are supposed to be taken over a long period of time. Other medicines should be taken only for a specific length of time (for example, a week or a month). The length of time a medicine should be taken depends on the type of medicine, your health status, and the reason you are taking the medicine. Taking a medicine for longer than intended may not provide additional health benefits. It could even harm you. A report received recently by SafeMedicationUse.ca highlights that it can be challenging to keep track of when medicines should be stopped.

After hip surgery, a consumer was treated with a blood thinner to prevent blood clots. This treatment was prescribed for 30 days, beginning the day after the surgery, and the consumer took the drug for exactly 30 days, as prescribed. Two months after the blood thinner was stopped, the consumer was transferred to a nursing home. The healthcare providers at the nursing home mistakenly referred to an older medication list and were not aware that the blood thinner treatment course had already been completed. They re-started the blood thinner, even though the consumer didn't need this drug anymore.

After 5 months in the nursing home, the consumer went to visit a family member. Staff in the nursing home gave the consumer all of the medicines that would be needed during the family visit. The family member realized that the consumer was taking the blood thinner again, even though this drug was supposed to have been stopped 7 months before! The family member checked with the consumer's doctor, and the doctor made sure that the blood thinner was stopped.

This example illustrates how you and your family members can play a key role in making sure you take your medicine for the correct length of time. SafeMedicationUse.ca has the following advice:

- Any time a new medicine is prescribed for you, ask whether it should be taken on an ongoing basis or for a specific length of time.
- If the medicine is intended only for a specific length of time, be sure you know when to stop taking it.
- If you are unsure how long you should be taking any of your current medicines, ask your healthcare providers for more information.
- Keep a list of all your medicines and how you use them. For each medicine, include the date when you should stop taking it, if applicable. Put this information into your daily calendar too, as a reminder. Take the list with you every time you seek medical care. Show the list of medicines to your healthcare providers, and ask them to help you update the list if they make any changes to your medicines.
- If a healthcare provider instructs you to change the way you are taking a medicine, including stopping a medicine altogether, be sure to get the new instructions in writing. Tell your pharmacist and other healthcare providers about the change.
- Review your medicines with your pharmacist on a regular basis. In many parts of Canada, pharmacists offer medicine review programs. Check with your pharmacist to find out if this service is available.

Tips for Practitioners:

- Update patient records to ensure that discontinued medicines are removed from lists of active treatments.
- Perform medication reconciliation whenever a patient moves from one setting of care to another. Always use the most up-to-date information sources, and speak to patients and family members about the way that medicines are actually being used.
- Conduct regular medicine reviews for each patient in your care to determine if there are any medicines that can be stopped.
- When prescribing or dispensing a medicine, be sure the patient understands why the medicine is needed and for how long it should be taken. Where applicable, indicate the treatment duration on the prescription. Having this information on the label will help remind the patient and his or her caregivers that the medication is to be stopped after a certain amount of time or that a reassessment is needed.
- If you are instructing a patient to stop taking a medicine, be sure to inform the patient's pharmacy and other relevant healthcare providers.

More information can be found at:

[An Important Question - Does This New Medicine Replace One of My Current Medicines?](http://www.safemedicationuse.ca/newsletter/newsletter_NewMedicineReplaceOneOfMyMedicines.html)

(http://www.safemedicationuse.ca/newsletter/newsletter_NewMedicineReplaceOneOfMyMedicines.html)

[Medication Reconciliation Can Help to Reduce the Chance of Errors with Medicines!](http://www.safemedicationuse.ca/newsletter/newsletter_BPMH.html)

(http://www.safemedicationuse.ca/newsletter/newsletter_BPMH.html)

[Keep a List of Your Medicines](http://www.safemedicationuse.ca/tools_resources/medication_list.html)

(http://www.safemedicationuse.ca/tools_resources/medication_list.html)

[One Simple Solution for Medication Safety](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f2KCCWMnXSt8&list=UUL-IWPkXQn3JYYYsPnpGIIg) (A Doc Mike Evans video)

(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f2KCCWMnXSt8&list=UUL-IWPkXQn3JYYYsPnpGIIg>)

This newsletter shares information about safe medication practices, is noncommercial, and is therefore exempt from Canadian anti-spam legislation.