Understanding your Medicines

Each year, thousands of people are hospitalized, remain sick, and spend more money than they have to because they don’t understand their medications. The American Pharmacists Association recommends that you be able to answer the following key questions before taking any new medications.

1. What is the name of the medication and what is it supposed to do?
2. Does this medication contain anything that can cause an allergic reaction?
3. Should I avoid alcohol, any other medicines, food, and/or activities?
4. What if I forget to take my medication?
5. Is there a generic version of this medication?

The average cost of emergency room visit is $11,049 compared to $1,153 for a visit to primary care. Because primary care isn’t available 24/7, Urgent Care centers are a middle-of-the-road alternative.

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Heart bypass surgery costs about $57,000
The average cost of a 30-day prescription of one name brand drug is $71 compared to $22 for the generic equivalent.

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Natural Alternatives to Over-the-counter Medicines

QUESTION: I have suffered from insomnia for the past year and would like to know if you could recommend a natural alternative to over-the-counter sleep aids. I exercise 3 times and I’ve tried progressive relaxation but nothing seems to help unless I take a sleep aid. My problem is not so much in falling asleep but in staying asleep.

ANSWER: Many of the pharmacological sleep aids, whether prescription or over the counter, may interfere with REM sleep. They may help you get to sleep more easily but you may find yourself waking up early or feeling tired and sluggish when you get up. You might try some of the more natural approaches that may help you relax and sleep more soundly. Valerian root extract has been shown to reduce sleep latency and increase sleep efficiency. It is often combined with extract of lemon balm for enhanced sedation effects.

Chamomile tea contains an active ingredient known as apigenin, which binds to the same receptors as benzodiazepines such as Valium. Jasmine has been shown in animals to be sedating, although jasmine tea often contains caffeine, which can be stimulating.

Tea made from an extract of kava kava. Kava kava may decrease anxiety and insomnia.

Small doses of melatonin (less than 1 mg) may help you sleep, especially when traveling across time zones to reset your biological clock and avoid jet lag.

Source: WebMD

5 Important Questions to ask your Healthcare Provider

1. What are the most important things I need to remember when I leave the office?
2. Why have you recommended this course of treatment?
3. Are there alternatives to the recommended course of treatment? If so, what are they?
4. What can I do to reduce my health risks in the future?
5. If I have additional questions, how will I get them answered in a timely manner?

Over the Counter Drugs

Today, drugs that in recent years were among the top 10 drugs in pharmacy budgets are now available as OTC product, at a significantly reduced total cost.

Examples of highly utilized medications that are now available without a prescription are Claritin, a non-sedating antihistamine used for allergies, and Prilosec, a proton pump inhibitor (PPI) used to treat gastrointestinal disorders, Xenical for weight loss.

Other drugs under consideration for future OTC conversions are Flonase allergy spray, Prevacid, another proton pump inhibitor in Prilosec’s drug class; and Allegra and Zyrtec, additional non-sedating antihistamines (NSA) in Claritin’s drug class.

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Generic Medications

Brand-name medications can be extremely expensive. Generic drugs are those drugs that have been judged chemically equivalent to brand-name drugs by the FDA. If it’s available and appropriate, consider the generic equivalent and save money.