

TAKE MEDICATIONS AS PRESCRIBED

After a heart event, it is important for you to play an active role in your heart health. The first step is taking your medications as prescribed and knowing why you are taking them. The second is planning and preparing for a medical emergency.

This chapter discusses the importance of taking medications as prescribed, provides useful tips and tools to help you keep track of your medications, and outlines how to prepare you and your family for a medical emergency.



LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

This chapter will help you to:

- Understand why it is important to take medications as prescribed
- Learn how to ensure you always have the medications you need and strategies for remembering to take them
- Prepare for and develop a medical emergency action plan should an unforeseen event arise

TAKING MEDICATIONS AS PRESCRIBED

After a heart event, medications can help protect you from future heart problems. The combination of medications you have been prescribed work together to help your heart in different ways – some may reduce your blood pressure while others might help lower cholesterol levels in the blood.

As outlined in the earlier chapter *Heart Disease and You*, there are many types of medications that you may be prescribed. It can take time to adjust to the new routine of taking many medications each day, especially if you were on little or no medications prior to your heart event. Taking your medications as prescribed can lower your risk of future heart problems.

A surprisingly large number of people do not take their medications as prescribed, which can increase the chance of hospitalizations and lead to ineffective treatment and serious illnesses. The following quiz can help to give you some idea of how compliant you are with taking your medications as prescribed:

	YES	NO
Do you ever forget to take your medications?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are you unsure of what to do if you forget your medication?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do your medications ever run out before getting them refilled?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are you unsure of what time of day to take your medications?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are you unsure of how foods might affect your medications?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you know of any over-the-counter medications that could affect the medications you are taking?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you ever doubled up your medications by accident?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you ever stopped a medication without talking to a doctor because you didn't like the side effects?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you ever forgotten to get refills before you traveled?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are you unsure why your doctor has prescribed your medications?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Adapted from the American Heart Association Compliance Quiz: What does compliance mean?

If you answered 'yes' to any of the questions in the quiz, you may be putting your heart health at risk. The good news is that you can take control of your medications and your heart health by following a few simple steps.



KEEP AN UPDATED LIST OF ALL YOUR MEDICATIONS

One of the best things you can do for managing your medications is keep a log like that shown below. The log can help you track medications you are on, the dose (how much to take), when to take it and whether any follow-up lab work is required (and how often). You can also note any symptoms and side effects you may be experiencing so that you can talk with your doctor about this at your next visit. Take this log with you when you visit your doctor, cardiologist, pharmacist or dentist so they know what medications you are on. A full-page version of the medication log can be found in the *Resources* chapter at the end of this manual.

MY MEDICATION LOG					
MEDICATION NAME	COLOUR OF PILL	REASON I'M TAKING IT	DOSE (NUMBER OF PILLS TO TAKE)	TIME TO TAKE MEDICATION	SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS
<i>Aspirin</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Make blood less sticky</i>	<i>1 pill/day</i>	<i>8:00 am</i>	<i>Take with food</i>

If you take a number of medications, some people find it useful to tape a pill of each prescription to their medication log, so they know what it looks like.

If you don't have a list already, it's easy to make a list using the example above. Remember to include ALL medications that you take, including over-the-counter medicines, vitamins and supplements. If you need help putting a list together, talk to your healthcare team or pharmacist. By keeping a copy of your medication list in a visible place, such as the refrigerator door, it can also help you to remember to take them.

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TAKE MEDICATIONS AS PRESCRIBED

All your medications work together to help your heart. It is important that you take them as prescribed and do not suddenly stop taking any medications or change the dose without first talking to your doctor. If you are experiencing any side effects from your medications, it is important that you talk to your doctor about these side effects.

Keeping track of all the medications you take and when to take them can seem like putting the pieces together for a puzzle. The medication log described earlier can help to keep track of all of the medications you are taking – including vitamins, supplements and over-the-counter medicines. Following is a list of a few tools that can help you develop a system for taking them as prescribed:

WEEKLY PILLBOX

If you take several medications each day at different points throughout the day, you can purchase a pillbox that is divided into sections to help you keep track of what pill to take and when. Pillboxes are available at most drug stores. You can talk to your pharmacist about one that might be best for you or if they offer free pillboxes. Fill your pillbox on the same day every week.



SET UP REMINDERS

Our lives are busier today than ever and often we need reminders to keep track of everything going on. The same is true for your medications.

- If you have a smartphone that you use regularly, you can schedule when you are supposed to take your medications into your calendar and set up email/text reminders/notifications. You can also set the alarm on your watch to a specific time that you need to take your medication. There are also several medication reminder apps available.
- Get into a regular routine. Often it is easier to remember to take your medications when you first get up in the morning or before you go to bed at night.
- Keep it visible but out of reach of children. Sometimes simply keeping your medicine in a visible area that you see daily can serve as a reminder.

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PLAN AHEAD FOR REFILLS AND TRAVEL

Don't go on vacation without your medication.

MEDICATION REFILLS:

All prescriptions come with a label that can help you determine how long that medication will last and how many refills are left for that prescription. Keeping track of how long a medication will last can help you ensure that you refill that prescription in a timely manner.

When you first pick up your prescription, look at the date when current prescription will run out. Plan to renew it a week before this date and schedule a reminder in your day timer or smartphone calendar. If you have any questions about how long your prescription supply is for (e.g. 30 days), talk to your pharmacist. They can work with you to determine the approximate timing for refills and may offer services to help make managing your refills easier.

If you run out of medication before your refill is ready, talk to your pharmacist. Often, they can give you a one or two-day supply of pills to tide you over until your refill arrives.

The bottom of your prescription label also tells you how many refills are remaining. When you first pick up your prescription, take a note to determine if there are refills left. If not, contact your doctor as soon as possible. Some doctors will renew prescriptions over the phone, but many require an appointment.

TRAVEL PLANS:

If you are heading away during the holidays or travelling with work, plan ahead to ensure you have enough of your medications with you:

- Take all your medications with you on your trip.
- Include a few extra days' worth of all your medications in case you run into any travel delays.
- Take your medication log and contact number for your doctor and pharmacist with you.
- Carry all your medications and the list with you in your carry-on bags. That way if your baggage is delayed or lost, you still have your medications on hand.

A NOTE ABOUT SUPPLEMENTS

After you have a heart event, it may seem like information promoting supplements is everywhere – from the pharmacy to the internet, your family, and even

healthcare professionals. While research suggests some supplements may benefit heart health others can interfere with medications – both over-the-counter and prescription medications – and cause potentially harmful side effects. For example, warfarin (Coumadin) which is used to treat and prevent blood clots from forming can interact with several supplements, as well as vitamin K in foods.

Supplements are also sometimes called natural health products, and may include vitamins and minerals, as well as herbal and homeopathic remedies.

Important things to remember when considering vitamins and supplements:

- **Discuss supplements with your doctor or other healthcare provider** – Before you make any decisions about supplements, talk with a healthcare professional such as your doctor, dietitian, pharmacist, or nurse. They can help ensure that the supplements you choose to take are safe, given your health history and medication and supplement regime. They can also discuss research on effectiveness and other factors to consider, including cost and availability.
- **Keep an updated list of all medications, supplements and vitamins** – Sharing this information with your healthcare providers can help make sure you get all the information you need to stay safe and healthy.
- **Don't assume that 'Natural' equals safe** – Some products advertised as being natural can have potentially dangerous side effects.
- **Use approved products** – You can identify products that have been authorized for sale in Canada by Health Canada by looking for the eight-digit Natural Product Number (NPN) or Homeopathic Medicine Number (DIN-HM) on the label. An NPN or DIN-HM means that the product can be legally sold in Canada and is safe and effective when used according to the instructions on the label. However, some authorized products may still cause interactions or side effects.
- **Educate yourself using trustworthy sources** – Some of the information available about supplements is misleading and not supported by research. In addition to healthcare professionals, one trustworthy source of information is the National Institute of Health Office of Dietary Supplements (<https://ods.od.nih.gov>).

While supplements may support the lifestyle changes you are making as part of your rehabilitation, they should not replace them. Heart healthy benefits are well established for healthy eating, regular physical activity, stress management, and heart medications.

PREPARING FOR A MEDICAL EMERGENCY

You have probably thought through an emergency evacuation for your home in case of fire, but have you thought about what you would do in the case of a medical emergency in your home? After a heart event or being diagnosed with heart disease, it is important to be prepared for a heart-related emergency and to share your plan with those closest to you.

While creating an emergency action plan may seem straightforward, there are a few things to think about.

① ALWAYS CALL 911 FIRST:

In the event of an emergency, call 911. When you call Emergency Medical Services (EMS), they will want to know:

- Your location
- What happened
- The telephone number you are calling from
- The gender and approximate age of the person with the problem
- Whether the person is conscious and alert
- Whether the person is breathing

When thinking about your emergency plan, consider:

- *Are there complicated directions to your home?* If so, write these directions down and have them next to your phone. This will ensure you or someone calling EMS on your behalf is able to provide accurate directions to help them get to your home as quickly as possible.
- *Can you see your house number clearly from the street?* Ensure you trim trees and remove anything that may be blocking the view of your house number from the street. Replace your porch lights as soon as they burn out. Consider installing a motion-activated light at your front entrance.
- *Do you have a house key hidden outside?* If you are the only person home and the door is locked, tell EMS the location of your hidden house key.

On a piece of paper near the phone, consider placing the following:

- Your address and phone number
- Directions to your home
- The location of your hidden house key
- The name and address of the neighbor, friend or family member who has your house key
- Capsule of Life location

- Does a neighbour have a key to your house? Inform your neighbour of your emergency action plan. Write this information down near your phone so you remember to tell EMS when you call them.

2 INVOLVE YOUR FAMILY

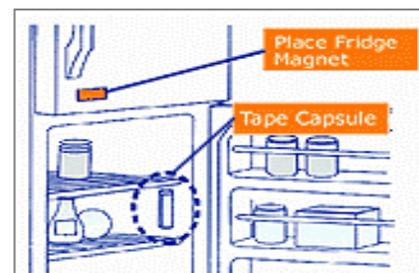
If something were to happen to you, do those closest to you to know what to do? Here are a few steps to getting family and close friends involved in your emergency action plan:

- Talk to them about the signs of a heart attack so that they can recognize the symptoms (the *Heart Disease and You* chapter outlines these in detail).
- Explain that calling 911 immediately and waiting for EMS to arrive is important (rather than them driving you to the hospital)
- Consider having close family members receive some basic training in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) that can restore blood flow to someone suffering from a cardiac arrest until EMS arrives. For information on training programs, visit www.heartandstroke.ca/cpr.

3 CREATE A CAPSULE OF LIFE

A *Capsule of Life* is a plastic capsule containing information about your medical condition, medication, allergies, and next of kin, as well as a form where you can outline your resuscitation wishes. You can include important medical information for all people in your household in the capsule.

The capsule includes a plastic container with a form on which to write your important information and an orange fridge magnet to place on the door of your refrigerator. Tape the capsule beneath the top shelf of your fridge and place the orange sticker on the outside of the fridge (as outlined in the picture).



Your Capsule of Life speaks for you in an emergency.

By recording all your important medical information in this capsule, you can ensure EMS gets all the information they need to help you and your family in a medical emergency.

Capsules of Life are available at Calgary CO-OP pharmacies.

