

# Managing Your Meds

LEARN HOW TO TAKE PRESCRIPTIONS PROPERLY—AND GET BETTER SOONER

How many times have you forgotten to take a dose of a prescription medication? Have you ever been given antibiotics that you stopped taking halfway through because you felt better? Or what about that medication your doctor prescribed that you didn't fill because you couldn't afford it?

If any of these scenarios sound familiar, you're not alone. "It's common for patients to forget pills, miss doses or decide not to take their prescription medications," says Lori J. Heim, M.D., president of the American Academy of Family Physicians. "Or they take it with food when it should be taken on an empty stomach, or vice versa."

But there are reasons you should take your medication as instructed. Here, we answer some common questions about prescription medications.

## Q HOW IMPORTANT IS IT TO TAKE MEDICATIONS EXACTLY AS PRESCRIBED?

"It depends on the medication," Heim says. "If it's an antibiotic used to kill bacteria and you stop taking it too soon, only the weaker bacteria are killed off, and the bacteria left behind come back stronger." In terms of chronic conditions, such as thyroid disorders, high blood pressure and diabetes, Heim says that not taking medication can cause the underlying diseases to progress or not improve.

She also points to increased risk of experiencing side effects if you don't follow the instructions for your medication. "For instance, after taking some osteoporosis medications, you can't lie down for 30 minutes because inflammation of the esophagus can occur," she says. Read the materials that come with your medication, and if you have questions, ask your doctor or pharmacist.



## Make a List and Check It Twice

It can be hard to remember all the instructions surrounding each of your medications. So don't leave it to memory—use the American Heart Association's checklist for taking prescription medication. Visit [americanheart.org](http://americanheart.org) and search "prescription checklist."

## Q WHAT IF I CAN'T AFFORD WHAT'S PRESCRIBED?

Heim suggests talking to your doctor before he or she writes a prescription and asking about the cost and whether a less expensive or generic formula will work. "There are pharmacy assistance programs available to help out those who need it," says Heim, who suggests Partnership for Prescription Assistance at [pparx.org](http://pparx.org).

## Q WHAT CAN I DO TO PREVENT FORGETTING A DOSE?

"I always tell patients to put their pill bottles on the kitchen table or another high-traffic area where you are likely to see them," Heim says.

If you have to store them somewhere secure because of children or pets, put a medication reminder on your refrigerator or set an alarm on your watch or phone. Heim also recommends setting up a pillbox at the beginning of each week, in case you have trouble remembering if you took your daily dosage. —By Jill Schildhouse

# 12

Percentage of Americans who don't take a prescribed medication even after they buy it.