

You and your prescribed medicines: enabling and supporting patients to make informed decisions

Information for the public

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About this information

NICE clinical guidelines advise the NHS on caring for people with specific conditions or diseases and the treatments they should receive. The information applies to people using the NHS in England and Wales.

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Some advice on communication between healthcare professionals when a patient is transferred from one care setting to another has been updated and replaced by [Medicines optimisation](#) (NICE guideline 5). See the guideline for more information.

This information explains the advice about enabling patients to make informed choices by involving and supporting them in decisions about prescribed medicines that is set out in NICE guideline CG76.

In this information 'medicines' is used as a general term to refer to prescribed medicines and includes tablets, syrups, ointments, creams, eyedrops and suppositories.

In the NHS in England and Wales, medicines can be prescribed by doctors and by some nurses and pharmacists who have special training. Because this guidance applies to all members of the healthcare team who prescribe and review medicines, this information refers to 'your healthcare professional' throughout.

Does this information apply to me?

The advice in the NICE guideline covers all adults, including people with disabilities, people from all cultures and those whose first language is not English.

It does not specifically look at children and young people. However, the recommendations may be considered for children and young people if they are thought able to take part in decisions on prescribed medicines.

Your care

All NICE clinical guidelines state that you have the right to be fully informed about your condition and possible treatments and to make decisions in partnership with your healthcare team.

All healthcare professionals should treat you with respect, sensitivity and understanding. If you agree, your family and carers should have the chance to be involved in decisions about your care. Family members and carers also have the right to the information and support they need in their roles as carers.

If people are unable to understand a particular issue or are not able to make decisions for themselves, healthcare professionals should follow the Department of Health's [advice on consent](#) and the [code of practice for the Mental Capacity Act](#). Information about the Act and consent issues is available from [Carers Direct](#) on NHS Choices. In Wales healthcare professionals should follow [advice on consent from the Welsh Government](#).

Being involved in decisions about your medicines

Almost everyone is given a prescription for a medicine at some time, but some people don't use their medicines as prescribed. Sometimes this is because they are worried about the medicine and don't want to use it, sometimes they don't understand why they need it and sometimes they have practical problems (such as fitting medicine-taking into their routine).

Healthcare professionals can help you as a patient to make choices about treatment by involving and supporting you in decisions about medicines:

- before any medicine is prescribed
- over the course of your treatment.

Improved communication

You should ask questions about your condition and possible treatments and you should tell your healthcare professional about any concerns.

Good communication between patients and healthcare professionals is important, but some patients find it difficult to communicate with their healthcare professionals. To make sure that you have the chance to be involved in decisions about medicines your healthcare professional should adapt their consultation style to your needs. They should check whether you have any special communication needs such as hearing or sight problems, or difficulties with reading or speaking English, or a physical or learning disability. They should take these needs into account and might use pictures, symbols, large print, a different language, an interpreter or advocate to help you understand information about your condition and possible treatments.

Finding out about your condition and possible treatments

Healthcare professionals have a duty to help patients make an informed choice about treatments by explaining the likely benefits and risks. Your healthcare professional should encourage you to ask questions about your condition and possible treatments and should ask if you have any concerns.

Questions you might ask about medicines

- What are the benefits of this medicine?
- What are the risks in using this medicine?
- What effect might the medicine have on my symptoms and everyday life?
- How long will it take to have an effect?
- Are there any side effects associated with this medicine?
- What other treatments are available?
- What support can you offer me if I decide not to take any medicines?

Your healthcare professional should explain the possible benefits from a treatment and openly discuss the pros and cons.

They should offer you information about a medicine before prescribing it. Information should be clear and easy to understand and should meet your needs. Your healthcare professional should talk about the information with you and make sure you've understood it. If you are staying in hospital you have the right to the same type of information about your medicines.

Information about medicines

Some people want to know more about their medicines than others. The information offered to you about medicines should meet your needs and is likely to include:

- what the medicine is
- how the medicine is likely to improve your condition
- possible side effects, and what you should do if you think you have them
- how to use the medicine
- what to do if you miss a dose
- whether you might need another course and how to get a further supply.

You may be offered other information if you or your healthcare professional thinks this might be helpful.

The NICE guidance says your healthcare professional should suggest where you can find more information and support (for example, from a website such as [NHS Choices](#)).

You should ask your healthcare professional for any information you need to make a decision about prescribed medicines.

Making a decision

Your healthcare professional should accept that you have the right to refuse a medicine or to stop taking a medicine.

Your healthcare professional should make sure that you have the chance to be involved in decisions about medicines so that you can make an informed choice about your treatment. They shouldn't assume that you would prefer a particular treatment. They should talk with you about your preferences and what you know about a medicine, and about any worries (such as side effects or becoming dependent). They should ask you what you hope the treatment will achieve.

Your healthcare professional should understand that you might have different ideas from them about the benefits, risks and side effects of a medicine. They should know that you might not want to take too many medicines, that you might want to talk about alternative therapies and what might happen if you don't take the medicines suggested. They should accept that you have the right to refuse a medicine or to stop taking a medicine, even if they think this could mean that your condition might get worse. Together, you and your healthcare professional should decide whether a medicine should or should not be prescribed.

Getting the most from your medicines

Getting your medicines at the pharmacy or dispensary

The healthcare professional should check that you have all the information you need about your medicine when the medicine is dispensed (this may be at the hospital pharmacy, local chemist or dispensing doctors' surgery). Most medicines come with a patient information leaflet (called a PIL). If you're worried about anything you read in this leaflet you should discuss this with a healthcare professional.

Reviewing medicines

Your healthcare professional should understand that people sometimes don't take their medicines.

If you are taking several medicines over a long period, a healthcare professional should talk with you about your medicines on a regular basis. This may be called a 'medicines review'. The NICE guidance says that a healthcare professional should regularly review decisions about medicines. During the medicines review your healthcare professional should ask you again how you view your condition and treatment and they will probably offer you some more information.

They should ask if you have any worries about your medicines (for example, about side effects or becoming dependent) or any practical problems (such as opening bottles or packets, or the costs of prescriptions). Your healthcare professional should understand that people sometimes don't take their medicines. They may ask whether you've missed any doses recently, cut down on the dose or

stopped the medicine and then started it again. This is a good opportunity for you to talk about any concerns and how your healthcare professional can help you overcome any problems. For example, some patients may want to talk about:

- fitting medicines into their daily routine
- cutting down or stopping medicines they've been taking for a long time
- choosing between medicines if they think they're taking too many.

If you have a particular practical problem that makes it difficult to use your medicine, your healthcare professional might make the following suggestions.

Some possible suggestions for overcoming practical problems

- Making a note when you take your medicine
- Using a box with different compartments to help you remember whether you've taken your tablets
- Special packaging that you can open more easily
- Fitting your medicine-taking into your daily routine
- Different ways of paying for your medicines to reduce costs

It is very important that your healthcare professional knows about any concerns you might have about side effects. They should offer you the chance to talk again about the benefits, side effects and long-term effects of your medicines and how you would like to deal with side effects. They may make some suggestions for dealing with side effects.

Some possible suggestions for dealing with side effects

- Adjusting the dosage (perhaps reducing the strength of the medicine)
- Changing the time when you take each dose

- Changing to another medicine with a different risk of side effects

Your healthcare professional should encourage you (perhaps with the help of your family) to keep an up-to-date list of all medicines you are taking. The list should include prescribed medicines, those you've bought, and vitamin, mineral or herbal supplements. If you have allergic reactions or harmful effects from any medicines or supplements you should also make a note of these.

The medicines review (see the [Reviewing medicines](#) section) is an opportunity for you to think again about your treatment. At the medicines review your healthcare professional should help you to make informed choices by involving and supporting you in any decisions about medicines.

Making sure healthcare professionals involved in your care know about your condition and treatments

It is important that all healthcare professionals involved in your care know about your condition and treatments and there should be good communication between healthcare professionals. If you are transferred from one place to another – for example, from one hospital ward to another, or into the community if you have been in hospital – relevant information about you and your medicines should be shared between healthcare professionals (and social care practitioners) involved in your care. This should include:

- your contact details
- your GP's contact details
- details of other relevant contacts you or members of your family or your carers have identified (for example, your nominated community pharmacy – the pharmacy that is most suitable for you)
- information about allergies you have to medicines or their ingredients or reasons why you haven't been able to take specific medicines in the past
- details of the medicines you are taking at the moment, including the dose, how they are taken and what they are taken for
- changes to your medicines, including medicines started or stopped, or dosage changes, and reason for the change

- date and time of the last dose – for example, for medicines that are taken once a week or once a month, including any injections or patches you have
- what information you (or your family members or carers) have been given
- other information, including when your medicines should be reviewed or monitored, and what support you may need to carry on taking the medicines.

More information

You can go to [NHS Choices](#) for more information.

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