

Your medication

- A brief guide for patients and carers

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While you are a patient with us, you may be prescribed medication by a doctor, nurse or pharmacist, and we believe it is very important that wherever possible you are involved in decisions about your medication.

The prescriber will want to discuss with you (and if appropriate your carer) your preferences about medication and any concerns you might have about side effects. We will also try to address any religious, cultural, belief or dietary issues related to your medication that might arise. Where possible you will be given a choice of medication. However, there may sometimes be occasions when you are very unwell and a decision may have to be made in your best interest.

How prescribing decisions are made

All prescribers are highly qualified. They will use various sources of information to help you reach a decision together about the most suitable medication for you. Often national guidance is used, eg, from the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE), to help make decisions about what medication to use. Prescribers will also use their clinical experience and that of their colleagues to help decide which medication will be the most effective and suitable.

Any decision made will also take into account your physical and mental health and also what other medication you are on and what side-effects you might experience.

Things you should know and things we should tell you

- You should be given clear information about your treatment plan
- You should be given clear information about your illness and your medication
- You should be given clear information about the different medication options available to treat your illness
- You should be given clear information about other treatment options (if available) that don't involve medication
- You should be told about the potential side effects of your medication and what to do about them
- You should be given the opportunity to discuss any concerns about your medication with your doctor, pharmacist or nurse.

Questions about medication that you might want to ask

- Why do I need to take medication and how will it help me?
- How long will I need to take it for?
- What will happen if I stop taking it?
- What happens if it doesn't work?
- What are the side-effects and how likely are they to occur?
- How often will my medication be reviewed?
- Will my physical health be monitored to prevent long term side effects, eg, my weight and cholesterol levels?
- What happens if my illness gets worse and I need more urgent treatment?

Information about side effects

All medicines are capable of causing side effects in some patients. Often these are quite minor and may only last for a short time eg, nausea (feeling sick). Some side effects may be more serious or be longer lasting. If you are worried, speak to your doctor, pharmacist or nurse and they will be able to advise you.

The chances of having a particular side effect may be described in words or figures in the Patient Information Leaflet that comes with your medication. The words 'very common', 'common', 'uncommon', 'rare' and 'very rare' are used in many leaflets about medication and they have precise meanings with regard to side effects, namely:

- **Very common** means that if 10 people are given the medication, at least 1 of them is likely to get this side effect
- **Common** means that if 100 people are given the medication, approximately 5 of them may get this side effect
- **Uncommon** means that if 1,000 people are given the medication, approximately 5 of them may get this side effect
- **Rare** means that if 10,000 people are given the medication, approximately 5 of them may get this side effect
- **Very rare** means that if 100,000 people are given the medication, less than 10 of them may get this side effect.

Potential interactions

When two or more medicines are taken at the same time their effects are sometimes different to when they are taken separately. The prescriber will want to be sure that the medication they prescribe for you will work well with all other medicines you are taking. When they are discussing the options for medication with you they will want to know about medication currently prescribed by your GP and also about medicines you purchase from a pharmacy, a shop or via the internet. This will include food, diet supplements, herbal medicines and homeopathic medicines.

Some medication may also have the potential to interact with certain foods. If your doctor, pharmacist or nurse feels this may happen they will advise you about foods and drinks that you should avoid or that should you only eat/drink in small quantities.

Names and potencies (strengths) of medication

- Medicines often have more than one name. The 'generic' name, eg, ibuprofen, is the official scientific name given to the ingredient(s) in the medicine. Unbranded 'generic' medicines may be made by various manufacturers who are licensed to make the medication. These are usually cheaper for the Trust to buy and the savings made can benefit the NHS as a whole. The 'brand' name is the name given to the medicine by the company that makes it. For example Nurofen® is a brand of ibuprofen. Branded medicines are often more expensive.
- Generic and branded versions of one medication contain the same active ingredient(s), are equally safe and work in exactly the same way as each other
- The prescriber will usually use the generic name when prescribing medication unless it is inappropriate to do so. If you are unsure about the name(s) of your medication or feel it is not what you are usually prescribed, ask your doctor, pharmacist or nurse for clarification
- Most medication will also have a number after the name to indicate the amount of active ingredient in one tablet, capsule or 5ml dose. For example, paracetamol 500mg (milligrams) or aspirin 75mg. The number is not an indication of potency and cannot be compared between different medicines. A potent medication may require a dose of only 20mg of the active ingredient to treat your condition, whereas a less potent one may require a dose of 1000mg or even more to have a similar effect. Only different strengths of the same medication can be directly compared.

How to take your medication

- If you look after your own medication, always read and follow all the instructions on the labels. For example, some medication should be taken on an empty stomach or it will not work as well as it should, and some may need to be taken at the same time as food to avoid irritating the stomach. Some tablets and capsules are specially coated or designed to release the medication slowly. These need to be swallowed whole and must not be broken or chewed
- It is always best to take medication with plenty of water while sitting upright or standing. Do not try to swallow the tablet or capsule dry, but instead allow the water to flush the tablet or capsule off the tongue and down the throat. This will ensure it quickly gets to your stomach and doesn't get stuck. Do not tip your head back to swallow the medication as this closes the throat. Your head should be in the same position it would be if you were eating a piece of fruit
- **Never** take more than the prescribed dose
- **Never** share your prescribed medication with anyone else as it could be harmful to them.

Storage and expiry dates

- Medication should be stored in a clean, dry place out of direct sunlight. Whilst most medication can be kept at room temperature, some will require refrigeration. This will be stated on the label
- All medication has a limited shelf life, called an expiry date. The date will usually be stamped on both the outer and the inner packaging unless the medication is dispensed into a plain brown bottle. Often the letters 'EXP' followed by the date is used. Do not use the medication after this date as it may not be safe. Expired medication should be returned to a pharmacy for safe disposal

- Some medicines, such as eye drops expire very quickly after opening and the label will tell you not to use them after a particular period of time. It is important that you follow this advice as eye drops can get contaminated once opened
- Always keep all medicines out of the reach of children.

Pharmacy Services within the Trust

The Trust employs a pharmacy team made up of specialist clinical pharmacists and specialist medicines management technicians. The aims of the pharmacy team are:

- To ensure your medication is safe, suitable and effective
- To offer unbiased advice on medication issues, including what your medication is for, how to take it and what side effects you might experience
- To provide verbal and printed information about your medication
- To run group or individual medication education sessions
- To ensure that all aspects relating to medication are looked after from your admission to the time of your discharge
- As far as is possible, to also provide these services to patients being cared for by our community teams.

On admission

If possible bring all your current medication with you on admission. We will look at what medication you are currently taking, including any medicines you or your carer have purchased, and check if they are suitable for continued use. We will ensure these are not wasted, unless they are found to be no longer suitable for your continued use.

Inpatients

Our clinical pharmacists often attend consultant ward rounds and use their expertise to contribute to the prescribing and medicine monitoring process. They offer advice on the most suitable medication to treat your mental illness, and if appropriate, any physical health conditions you may have.

On discharge

The pharmacy team ensure you have enough medication on discharge to allow you time to make an appointment with your GP who will then usually take over the prescribing. Your GP will be told about any changes that were made to your medication during your stay in hospital or during your outpatient appointment.

Further information

You can access lots more information about medication, and find links to information leaflets about specific mental health conditions and the medication used in their treatment, on our website:

www.sussexpartnership.nhs.uk/service-users/what-happens/medication

Contact

If you have any comments about the pharmacy service or any questions about your medication, please do not hesitate to speak to a member of the pharmacy team or to another member of the clinical team providing your care. Alternatively, you can contact a member of the pharmacy team by first contacting:

The Personal Assistant to the Chief Pharmacist:

Telephone: 01243 622576

Email: pa.tochiefpharmacist@sussexpartnership.nhs.uk

Address: Orchard House, 9 College Lane Chichester, PO19 6FX

How to get in touch with our services

Patient, Advice & Liaison Service (PALS)

Email: pals@sussexpartnership.nhs.uk

PALS East Sussex Area Office Tel: 01323 446042

PALS West Sussex Area Office - Tel: 01903 843185

PALS Brighton & Hove Area Office - Tel: 01273 716588

If the office is not open a confidential message can be left on the answer phone

Customer Relations

Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust,
Swandean, Arundel Road, Worthing, West Sussex, BN13 3EP

Tel: 01903 843026 **Fax:** 01903 843153

Email: customerrelations@sussexpartnership.nhs.uk

Website: www.sussexpartnership.nhs.uk

Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust

Trust Headquarters, Swandean, Arundel Road,
Worthing, West Sussex, BN13 3EP

Main switchboard: 01903 843000

Web: www.sussexpartnership.nhs.uk

Email: info@sussexpartnership.nhs.uk

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