

## Using Medications Safely

\_\_\_ Keep medicines in original containers so you can recheck label directions in case you forget.

\_\_\_ Read any instructions on the packaging, and keep them for future reference.

\_\_\_ Read the package insert (PI) that came with your medicine. For prescription drugs, the FDA requires that manufacturers provide this information in the PI:

- Drug description: Includes generic name and brand name; dosage form; pharmacological or therapeutic class; chemical name and structural formula; other important chemical or physical information.
- Clinical pharmacology: How this drug will work in your body.
- Indications and usage: Diagnoses for which the drug is FDA approved.
- Contraindications: Situations in which this drug should not be used.
- Warnings: Adverse reactions and potential safety hazards, what to do if they occur. The FDA requires a prominently-displayed “black box” warning of especially serious potential problems.
- Precautions: Situations such as pregnancy in which special care should be taken; how to handle common side effects safely.
- Adverse reactions: Undesirable side effects that could occur with this or similar drugs.
- Drug abuse and dependence: Potential for abuse and addiction.
- Overdosage: Signs and symptoms of overdose, complications that have been found to occur.
- Dosage and administration: Usual recommended dosage, timing, duration, limits, etc.
- How supplied: Strength of dosage forms, identifying information, storage and special handling guidelines.

\_\_\_ Store your medications where they cannot be accessed by children or pets, and at temperatures recommended in the PI. Most medications should be stored in a cool, dry place.

\_\_\_ Take all of the medication: As many dosages, as many times, for as many days as prescribed. Do not be tempted to stop just because you are feeling better.

\_\_\_ Dispose expired or unused drugs safely. Do not flush them down the toilet or pour them down the drain.

\_\_\_ If your community has a drug take-back program or hazardous waste collection site, this is the ideal way for disposal.

\_\_\_ With many medicines, however, it is safe to take them out of the original container, mix them with garbage such as coffee grounds or kitty litter, and throw them into the household trash. Check the FDA website ([www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov)) to make sure.