

Medication Management



Medications

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Medications

Prescriptions and Over-the-Counter Medications

Access to medications is different in the United States compared to many other countries. Many medicines that you can buy from a pharmacy in other countries require a medical appointment and a prescription in the US.

How we describe medications in the US:

A **prescription medication** requires an electronic or paper order from a medical provider to a pharmacy. The amount that you have to pay for the medicine is called a **copay**. When a pharmacy gives you a prescription medication, it is called **filling a prescription**.

An **over-the-counter medication** is one that you can buy without a prescription at any pharmacy, grocery store, or even online. If you are not sure what to buy at a pharmacy to help you feel better, you can ask the pharmacist there for advice.

Every medication has at least two names: a brand name and a generic name. **Brand names** for a medicine (like “Tylenol”) are the names given to it by the pharmaceutical companies that make the medicine, and the **generic name**, or **chemical name**, is the medicine’s active ingredient (like “acetaminophen”). An **active ingredient** is the substance that makes the medicine work. Sometimes there are multiple brand names for one generic medication (for example, both Motrin and Advil are brand names for the generic medicine ibuprofen). Active ingredients are mostly the same in every country.

How to Get More Medicine (Refills)

Some medications are meant to be taken for only a few days, like antibiotics for an infection. But a lot of medications are meant to be taken for months or years, like medications to keep blood pressure under control. These are called **chronic medications**.

For medicines that need to be taken long-term, you will need to ask the pharmacy for more medicine every month or every three months. In the United States, we call this a **refill**.

Medical providers can approve medications for up to one year. This means that you can get more medication without seeing your provider by asking for refills from the pharmacy. For safety reasons, sometimes your medical provider will ask you to come in for an appointment before giving you another prescription.

Pharmacies keep refills on file until patients need them. Some pharmacies automatically get refills ready for patients to pick up when they are due, and other pharmacies wait for patients to call or come in person to ask for more medication. If there are no refills on file at the pharmacy, they will either call your medical team directly to ask for another prescription or will tell you to call your medical team. ***Make sure you know if the pharmacy is contacting your team, or if you need to do it yourself.***

You should ask for the refill at least 4 business days **before** you run out of medication so that your team and the pharmacy have enough time to get the refill ready for you to pick up.

It is very important to keep taking your medicines until a medical provider tells you to stop, even if you are feeling better.

Where to Get Your Medications

CHA patients can get their prescriptions filled at any of the CHA pharmacies. They are located in Cambridge, East Cambridge, Malden, and Revere. Financial assistance is available to those who qualify.



Cambridge Hospital

1493 Cambridge St.
2nd floor, main building
617-665-1438



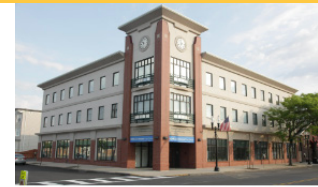
CHA East Cambridge

163 Gore Street
Next to Primary Care
617-499-6690



CHA Malden

195 Canal Street
1st floor
781-338-8990



CHA Revere

454 Broadway
1st floor
781-485-8272

Check our website for our current hours

CHA patients have the cheapest prices available at a CHA pharmacy compared to a commercial pharmacy like Walgreens or CVS. Health Safety Net insurance only pays for medications at a CHA pharmacy (low-cost or free medications). It is important that you know what type of insurance you have because it will affect how much you pay for medications and where you can get them.

CHA pharmacies also deliver medications to our patients for free. You can ask for your medicines to be delivered by calling the pharmacy directly or through the phone app RxLocal. <https://app.rxlocal.com/>

Reading Your Prescription Labels

Your prescription labels have a lot of important information. The label will include the medication name (brand and/or generic), the instructions for how much to take and how often to take the medicine, the name of the provider who prescribed the medication, the name / address / phone number of the pharmacy that filled the prescription, how much medication is in the bottle or box, how many refills are on file at the pharmacy, and other information.

Remember: if your label has a number of refills, call the pharmacy to request the next bottle (not your provider's office).

Prescription number: RX# 123456789

Pharmacy phone number to call to refill med: 617-665-1438

Special instructions about how to take med or warnings about side effects: If you drink alcohol, discuss the safe use of alcohol while using this medication with your health-care professional. Take this medication with a meal. Read label carefully for how many times to take each day.

Generic name: METFORMIN 500MG

Brand name: Substituted for Glucophage

Quantity: 60 EA

Number of refills left: (05) REFILLS REMAINING UNTIL 07/01/2025

Medication expiration date: Discard After: 07/01/2025

Description of what the medication looks like: film-coated white round tablet SIDE 1: A SIDE 2: 12

Important Information About Specific Types of Medications

Antibiotics

Antibiotics are medications that help fight diseases caused by bacteria. Bacteria can cause disease like strep throat, urinary tract infections, syphilis, and some pneumonias. Some common antibiotics are amoxicillin, penicillin, azithromycin, cephalexin, ciprofloxacin, metronidazole, and ceftriaxone. **All antibiotics require a prescription in the United States.**

Antibiotics in the United States are mostly given by mouth (oral), not by injection. These work just as well as injection medications.

Antibiotics do NOT treat viruses. A lot of common illnesses are viral – in fact, most of the time a cold is from a virus. When you are sick because of a virus, antibiotics will NOT help you feel better, and your medical team will not prescribe them to you.

If people take antibiotics when they are not needed, or if they do not take an antibiotic for the right amount of time, bacteria can change to become resistant to the antibiotic. When this happens, the antibiotic does not work anymore to kill the bacteria. **To prevent creating resistant bacteria, it is very important to only take antibiotics if they are prescribed by your medical team and to completely finish any prescription you are given (even if you feel better right away).**

Controlled substances

Controlled substances are medications that are regulated by the government because they can cause addiction or be abused (taken inappropriately for their side effects instead of taken as part of medical treatment). Some common examples of controlled substances are opioids (oxycodone, morphine, tramadol, and others), benzodiazepines (clonazepam / Klonopin, lorazepam / Ativan, diazepam / Valium, and others), gabapentin and pregabalin (Lyrica), and stimulants (amphetamine / Adderall, methylphenidate / Ritalin, and others). The government makes health care organizations have rules about how and when providers can prescribe these medications, and about how to monitor patients taking these medicines to keep them safe.

Some of these controlled medications are available in other countries without a prescription or monitoring. Even if you have been taking these medications in your country of origin, your medical team in the US may recommend alternative treatments if they feel that you have safer options for your health.

Contraception (birth control)

Many countries have birth control pills for sale at a pharmacy or store without a prescription from a medical provider. In the United States, almost all birth control methods – including pills – must be prescribed. As of 2024, there is a single birth control pill available at pharmacies that you can buy without a prescription (Opill / norgestrel).

All contraceptive medications at CHA are free if you cannot afford them. You can also receive 12 months worth of contraceptive medication at one time from any pharmacy in Massachusetts.

Contraceptive care at CHA

CHA's Sexual and Reproductive Health Program is a one stop resource to learn about and get connected to birth control methods, abortion services, and sexually transmitted infection testing. You do not need to be a CHA patient to use these services. Call 617-591-6746 to make an appointment.

Specific medication differences in the United States

There are some medications that you can buy in other countries but require a prescription or are not available at all in the US. Other medications are used differently in the US. Some of these differences include:

BRAZIL:

- Combination medications for pain and muscle spasms like Dorflex, Torsilax, and Neosaldina are not available in the US. These all include a muscle relaxant medication plus other active ingredients. Muscle relaxants are only available by prescription in the US.
- Hormonal combinations that include estrogen, progesterone, and testosterone (either as a chip, pill, or cream) are not used in the United States.
- Novalgina and Novalgina Infantil (dipirona, a nonsteroidal antiinflammatory or NSAID) are used in Brazil to treat pain and fever in children older than 3 months. This medication is not available in the US. Additionally, US medical providers recommend avoiding all NSAIDs in children younger than 6 months of age.

HAITI

- Cyproheptadine is available without a prescription in Haiti and is commonly used to increase appetite in children. This medication is only available by prescription in the US and is not used often.
- Aspirin is not used to treat children in the United States.

Staying Safe While Taking Medications

Follow these important directions to stay safe taking medicines:

1. Do not take anyone else's medications.
2. Do not take imported medications without asking your US medical team if it is safe and appropriate to do so.
3. Do not take more than the recommended or prescribed dose.
4. Do not take a medication more often than it is recommended or prescribed.
5. Do not stop taking your medications until your care team says to stop, even if you feel better.
6. Pay attention to instructions about how to take your medications – for example, some need to be taken on an empty stomach and others should be taken with food.
7. Pay attention to side effects from medications – for example, some medicines can cause dizziness, and you should not drive when you take them.
8. Be careful with over-the-counter medications:
 - Pay attention to the recommended ages, doses, and directions on the box / bottle – if you cannot understand the directions, a pharmacist can call an interpreter to explain them to you in your language.
 - Always use a measuring cup or measured syringe for doses – do not use teaspoons or kitchen spoons.
 - Pay attention to combination medications (medications with more than one active ingredient – these are mostly “cough and cold” medications). It is possible to overdose on a medication by accident if you are taking multiple combination medications that both include the same ingredient.
9. Know what to look for to recognize an allergic reaction, and know what to do. If you have:
 - Wheezing or trouble breathing after taking a medication, or any swelling of the face or throat: CALL 911 or go to the Emergency Room immediately.
 - Rash / hives (itchy red spots on the body that can come and go) without breathing trouble: stop the medication and call your primary care office right away.
If you do not have a regular primary care clinic, go to an urgent care.
 - Vomiting or diarrhea: call your primary care clinic right away. *If you do not have a regular primary care clinic, go to an urgent care.*



Medications and Children

Many medications can be dangerous for children if the child is too young or if the dose is too strong. If in doubt, ask a medical professional.

If your child is:

- **Under 2 months old: do not give any medications** without talking to a medical professional. *This includes fever medicines like acetaminophen or ibuprofen!*
- **Under 6 months old:** do not give ibuprofen. *You may give acetaminophen / Tylenol after 2 months old if a doctor says it is ok. The dose is based on the baby's weight - ask your child's doctor for the correct dose.*
- **Under 2 years old:** do not give over-the-counter medications other than acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Motrin/Advil) without asking a medical professional for the correct dose and a prescription.
- **Under 6 years old:** do not give any cough or cold medications unless a medical professional says that it is ok - these medicines can have serious side effects in young children (including affecting their breathing).
- **Never give aspirin to a child (under the age of 18)** unless told to by a medical provider (it can cause rare but serious illness called Reye syndrome in children).

In general:

- Always use a measuring cup or syringe for doses; do not use teaspoons or kitchen spoons.
- Never give more than the recommended dose.
- Pay attention to liquid strength and dosing - sometimes medicines for babies are actually stronger than the ones made for older children. One example of this is Infants' Motrin and Children's Motrin. Be very careful to check for the correct dose every time. If you have any questions, ask your child's doctor.
- Make sure that children cannot access medications and lock up controlled substances.
- Get rid of expired or unused medications (see "medication disposal" below).

Poison Control: 1-800-222-1222

If your child accidentally takes a medication they shouldn't, or too much of a medication, call the 24/7 free national Poison Control Center for immediate advice about what to do: 1-800-222-1222. (Interpreters are available)

These experts can help with any poisoning in both children and adults, whether a substance is eaten, drunk, splashed on the skin or in the eyes, or breathed in. You can also call if you are not sure if something is poisonous but are worried about an exposure.

Supplements (Vitamins, Minerals, Herbs, Protein Powders, etc.)

Supplements are not monitored in the US in the way that medications are. This means that there is no oversight to make sure that they work, that they are safe, and that the actual dose of the active ingredient is what the packaging says it is. Some supplements (like St Johns wort or vitamin K) can interact with other medications in unsafe ways, and some can be toxic if taken in high doses. Make sure that you tell your medical team if you are taking any supplements or vitamins without a prescription.

Most of the time, supplements are safe if taken following the directions on the packaging. But it is always a good idea to check with your medical team before starting a supplement.

Do not give your child vitamins or supplements without checking with their medical team first.

Medication Disposal: Getting Rid of Medications You Do Not Want or Need

If you have expired medications, medicines you don't need, or extra liquid antibiotics after finishing a prescription, you should get rid of them. This helps make sure that no one takes medicine inappropriately.

Some medications can be flushed down a toilet, and others have to be thrown out or given back to pharmacies. Sometimes police stations also accept unwanted medications.



You can find a location to give back unwanted medications here.

You can also ask your pharmacy for advice about how to get rid of medication.



CARE TO THE PEOPLE

For more information, please visit challiance.org.