

YOUR BODY, YOUR RESPONSIBILITY

Living with food and chemical sensitivities is difficult and in order to cope, you need to learn as much as you can about your illness and how to care for yourself especially when medication becomes necessary. When prescribing a medication your doctor should acknowledge your known reactions to specific substances and seek an appropriate medication for you, or offer an alternative to medication.

You are entitled to expect this as you pay for the consultation. However, should your doctor not be open to discussing your concerns, you can always consult another practitioner. You can also discuss the suitability of prescribed medications with your pharmacist and ask for consumer product information.

YOUR VISIT TO THE DOCTOR MAY BE MORE POSITIVE IF YOU PREPARE BEFORE YOU GO.

- Make a list of things you need to discuss with the doctor.
- If you have allergy test results or a list of your known allergens take them with you.
- If you have a list of medications to which you have had adverse reactions to in the past take it with you.
- If you are on any medications already, take a list of these with you.
- Describe your problems as accurately as you can, including how long you have had the symptoms, and anything that makes them better or worse.
- If you are nervous about seeing the doctor, ask a friend to go with you.

IT REALLY IS UP TO YOU

Before you decide to take any prescribed medications there are some things you need to discuss. You need to:

- Tell the doctor if you have any allergies or specific sensitivities e.g. salicylates, amines, benzoates, preservatives such as metabisulphite, colourings, gluten, lactose.
- Tell the doctor if you are pregnant or breastfeeding.
- Ask for the name of the medication, what type of medication it is and how it works.
- Ask if the medication contains colourings, preservatives or fillers that cause you adverse reactions.
- Ask if the medication is contra-indicated for the type of allergy or health problems you have e.g. irritable bowel syndrome.

- Ask if the medication will interact with any other medications or supplements you are currently taking.
- Ask if the medication produces any side effects and what you should do if side effects occur, e.g. should you stop the medication and contact the doctor.
- Ask if there are any alternatives to taking the medication.
- Ask for written instructions about taking the medication.
- Ask how long you need to take the medication and what will happen if you don't finish the course.

SPECIAL MEDICATION NEEDS

Having allergy, food intolerance and chemical sensitivity means that you need to exercise extra care when taking medications.

As well as the active ingredient, medications may also contain other 'inert' ingredients such as colourings, preservatives and fillers which can cause adverse reactions.

Medications may also contain substances that are similar in structure to those chemicals that provoke your specific sensitivity reactions. It is important that the doctor knows of your specific sensitivities and when a medication is being prescribed, similarities to other chemicals should be taken into consideration to minimise the risk of a medication exacerbating existing conditions. It is for these reasons that you need to have more information about medications than the average person. You need a high level of information on medications including:

- Comprehensive information about your medication, which should be in writing as much as possible.
- Comprehensive information on side effects and interactions between foods, other medications or substances such as vitamins, herbal preparations or homoeopathics.

ALTERNATIVES TO MEDICATION

Having severe chemical sensitivities may mean that you may have difficulty finding medications that do not exacerbate your illness. You may only be able to cope with minute amounts such as a quarter or an eighth of the dose.

In these circumstances it may be necessary to find some other form of therapy that does not

rely on medication e.g. acupuncture, exercise, physiotherapy, therapeutic massage, change of diet or lifestyle, natural therapies.

ALWAYS REMEMBER...

- If you feel your health concerns have not been taken seriously, you have the right to see another doctor for a second opinion.
- You are entitled to an adequate explanation in language and terms that you understand.
- You should be able to fully participate in all choices and decisions relating to your health care.
- You can always discuss your medication with a pharmacist who has a high-level of knowledge about pharmaceuticals.

INFORMED CHOICE

Before you choose to take a medication you need to fully understand the benefits or risks involved, e.g. side effects, costs, or whether the treatment is experimental. You have the right to change your mind about taking a medication at any time.

However, if you decide to stop the medication, you should talk to your doctor first.

YOUR RESPONSIBILITY

Remember, just as you have rights, you also have responsibilities:

- Make sure you fully understand your illness and treatment options. Don't be afraid to ask the doctor about anything you do not understand.
- Tell the doctor ALL the medications you are currently taking - including over-the-counter drugs and alternative therapies.
- Ask when the medication should be reviewed or discontinued.
- Apart from medication, ask what you can do to reduce your symptoms.
- Make sure you have described your symptoms accurately.
- Make sure the doctor has your full health history to assist with obtaining the right diagnosis.

Need more information on medications

- Contact your local medication help line

Need to take a medication: some things you may need to consider.

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- Your local poisons centre
- Therapeutic Goods Authority [Australian TGA](#)

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