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5 Things Your Pharmacist Wants You to Know

Pharmacists are more than people who hand you a prescription bag—they are medication safety experts and an important part of your healthcare team. Here are five things your pharmacist hopes you know so you can use medicines safely and effectively.

1. You Should Regularly Clean Out Old Medications

Expired or unused medications can be ineffective and, in some cases, unsafe. Over time, certain medicines can break down and may cause side effects or fail to treat your condition. Keeping old drugs around also raises the risk that a child, pet, or family member might take them by accident.

Try to review your medicine cabinet every month or two. Remove anything that is expired or clearly no longer needed. A simple option for most medicines is to mix them with kitty litter or used coffee grounds, seal them in a bag, and place them in the household trash.

2. Pill Splitting Is Not Always Safe

Splitting pills might seem like an easy way to save money, but it can be dangerous with certain medications. Some tablets have special coatings or extended-release layers that control how slowly the medicine enters your system. When you cut them, you can damage this design.

For example, if a blood pressure pill releases too quickly, your blood pressure could drop suddenly, causing dizziness, lightheadedness, or fainting. Only split a medication if your provider or pharmacist has confirmed that it is safe to do so.

3. Using One Pharmacy Protects You

Filling your prescriptions at **one primary pharmacy** helps your pharmacist see the full picture of your health. With access to your complete medication list, they can check for:

- Drug–drug interactions
- Duplicate therapies
- Allergies and past reactions

If you use multiple pharmacies, no single provider may see every medication you take, including over-the-counter products and supplements. Keeping everything in one place makes it easier to catch problems before they affect your health.

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4. How You Take Medications Matters

Even the right medicine can cause problems if you don't take it correctly. Swallowing pills with too little fluid can cause them to get stuck in your esophagus, which may lead to irritation or ulcers.

To take medicines safely:

- Use a full 8-ounce glass of water unless instructed otherwise.
- Stay upright for a bit after swallowing pills instead of lying down right away.

Always follow the directions on your prescription label and ask your pharmacist if anything is unclear.

5. It's Important to Ask What to Expect

Starting a new medication is the perfect time to talk with your pharmacist. One of the most helpful questions you can ask is, "What should I expect from this medicine?" This includes:

- Common side effects and serious symptoms that need urgent care
- How soon you should start feeling better
- What to do if you miss a dose

When you know what's normal and what isn't, you're more likely to take your medicine correctly and less likely to be surprised by side effects.

Your pharmacist is an essential partner in your care, ready to help you use medications safely and confidently. From checking for interactions to explaining new prescriptions, they are there to answer questions and protect your health. If you have concerns about your medications or how to take them, the pharmacists and providers at Valley Health are here to help.

To learn more or find a Valley Health location, visit valleyhealth.org.