Managing Your Medications
You can’t always get what you want. Sometimes you get what you need.

Some people rush off to the doctor for a prescription when they feel the slightest ailment. They’re surprised when the doctor “prescribes” bed rest, fluids, or an over-the-counter pain reliever. “Why did I bother going to the doctor? I could have prescribed that myself... Exactly! You don’t always need a prescription or a doctor visit to help you feel better.

Medications are a significant part of our lives as medical consumers. In fact, 46 percent of the total population uses prescription medications in any given year, and 84 percent of consumers use over-the-counter (OTC) medications each year. While medications can be extremely helpful in treating medical conditions, it’s important to understand them so that you can maximize their effectiveness and protect your health.

Understanding Your Medicines
Each year, thousands of people are hospitalized, remain sick, and spend more money than they have to because they don’t understand their medications. The American Pharmacists Association recommends that you be able to answer the following ten key questions before taking any new medications.

Ten Key Medication Questions

1. What is the name of the medication and what is it supposed to do?

2. When and how do I take it?

3. How long should I take it?

4. Does this medication contain anything that can cause an allergic reaction?

5. Should I avoid alcohol, any other medicines, food, and/or activities?

6. Should I expect any side effects?

7. What if I forget to take my medication?

8. Is it safe to become pregnant or to breastfeed while taking this medication?

9. Is there a generic version of this medication?

10. How should this medication be stored?

Making Medications Work Better
Modern medicine has brought about countless medications to help us feel better fast. But there are still things you can do to ensure that your medications work for you. Keep three words in mind: dosage, generics, and compliance.

Dosage
Specific dosages are prescribed for a reason. Never modify your dosage (e.g., break pills in half or otherwise change your dosage) without first talking with your healthcare provider and pharmacist! Not only can this be dangerous, but it can also delay healing.

Generic Medications
Brand-name medications can be extremely expensive. In fact, Americans spend about $100 billion on prescription drugs every year. Many times, there’s no need to spend so much for prescriptions. Generic drugs are those drugs that have been judged chemically equivalent to brand-name drugs by the FDA. If it’s available and appropriate, you may want to consider choosing a generic equivalent.
Managing Your Medications (continued)

Compliance
Compliance means taking your medication as prescribed by your doctor and pharmacist. Skipping dosages or not finishing medication is not recommended. Drugs have little benefit if not taken as directed. If you’re skipping dosages or “saving medication,” consider this: you’ll probably spend more money in the long run treating the same disease twice, or addressing complications that arise from not being compliant.

Avoiding Medication Errors
Each year, more than 770,000 Americans are injured because of medication errors. It has also been estimated that medication errors account for at least 7,000 deaths annually. Without a doubt, taking medications is serious business for you and your family. And while there’s no need to be fearful of medications, there are some simple ground rules to follow to help ensure your safety and health. Keep the following in mind when taking medications.

+ Know your medications inside and out. Make a list of all the medications you are taking along with the dosage, color, shape, size, and imprint on the pill. Knowing this information will help you recognize medications that may have been given to you by mistake.

+ Keep medications in their original containers. The label on your medication bottle contains important information about how the medicine inside is to be used. If you switch medications to another container, you’re asking for trouble and could be putting your health in serious jeopardy.

+ Read, read, read. Every time you take your medications, read the label on the container. Although it may be monoto-

+ Only take medication prescribed for you. Never take another person’s medication—not even medication prescribed to a family member. Medications are prescribed specifically for individuals based on their unique requirements.

+ Comply with medication directions. Do not break pills or alter dosages. Don’t skip dosages or stop taking medications early. Follow directions carefully.

Medication Inventory (What To Have On Hand)
It is important to be prepared and have medications on hand for the unexpected. The following OTC medications will come in handy in your home.

+ Pain relievers—Aspirin, acetaminophen, and ibuprofen for fever, general aches and pains, and headaches. Do not give aspirin to children.

+ Cough syrup—For common, mild coughs.

+ Antacids—For indigestion, heartburn, and digestive discomfort.

+ Antibiotics—For allergy symptom relief and sinus clearing.

+ Decongestants—For sinus clearing.

+ Eye drops—For sore, dry, red, and itchy eyes.

+ Triple antibiotic ointment—Neosporin or similar product for infections, scrapes, cuts, punctures, and piercings.

+ Aloe Vera rub—For burns, sunburns, scrapes, cuts, and punctures.

Take Test