It is likely you have some type of medicine in your home—either medicines prescribed by your doctor, over-the-counter medicines, or both. Whether you take these medicines routinely or “as needed” there is a chance an error can happen when you least expect it. Below are some safety tips to consider when using or storing medicines in your home.

**Here's What You Can Do**

### Preventing Mix-Ups

- **Prevent mix-ups between eye and ear drops.** Eye and ear drops come in containers that look very similar. Sometimes the label colors are also similar and can contribute to a mix-up. For example, if your eye and ear drops are stored near each other it is easy to pick the wrong one. Store eye and ear drops in separate locations. Also, consider putting a rubber band around one to the containers to make it look and feel different.

- **Prevent mix-ups between medicine and other products.** Sometimes household items are packaged in containers that look similar to medicine containers. For example, lip balm, such as ChapStick, is packaged in a similar way to a wart stick. In another example, a bottle of nail glue (Krazy Glue) comes may look similar to a bottle of eye drops. Store medicines away from non-medicine/other products so they do not get confused.

- **Prevent mix-ups between human medicine and pet medicine.** Keep medicine for people separate from pets’ medicine. Mix-ups can be dangerous. If a person takes a medicine for their pet or if a pet is given a medicine for a human, it can be harmful. There are some human medicines that are used to treat medical conditions in pets, but the doses may be very different. Store pet medicines separately from human medicines.

### Taking Your Medicine Safely

- **Follow the directions for use.** Always follow the directions found on the medicine label for both prescription and OTC medicines. If the directions for use are unclear, or if you have a question, ask your doctor or pharmacist—don't guess or make assumptions, even if you have taken the medicine previously. Products such as creams, liquids, eye/ear drops, and inhalers typically have directions for use on the outer box. Store these products in their original box so you have the directions available.

- **Know which medicines must be swallowed whole.** Some medicines are designed to dissolve slowly in the body over time. These medicines should never be split, crushed, chewed, or opened. If these medicines are split, crushed, chewed, or opened, the medicine can cause serious side effects and may not work properly to treat the condition. To learn more about which medicines cannot be split, crushed, chewed, or opened, visit here.

- **Measure liquid medicine correctly.** To give liquid medicine, use the measuring device that came with it. Dosing errors can happen if you use a dosing cup that was for a different liquid medicine because it may be a different size or have different measurement markings. Also, household teaspoons and tablespoons are not accurate and should NEVER be used for measuring medicine. Your pharmacist should give you a special measuring device such as a dosing cup or an oral syringe if one does not come with the medicine. If not, ask for one and how to use it to measure the correct amount of medicine. For more information about measuring liquid medicine, visit here.
Keep a list. Make a list of all the medicines you take including prescription medicines, over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, nutritional supplements, or herbal products. Include the dose, how often you take it, the doctor's name (who prescribed it), the name of your pharmacy, and why you are taking the medicine. Also be sure to include any drug allergies on this list. Keep a copy of this list with you and update it regularly. Also, give a copy to a family member in the event of an emergency. To learn more about keeping track of your medicines, visit here.

Devices to use medicines safely. There are products available to help you store and use your medicines safely. For examples, there are pill containers and organizers, measuring devices, and bottle adapters for liquid medicine bottles. Always read the directions for use carefully. Be sure these products do not pose a hazard to children, such as leaving the medicine without a secure child-resistant cap. To learn how one of these products can be unsafe for children, visit here.

Keep up-to-date on news and alerts with medicine. The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) provides consumer updates on prescription medicines, over-the-counter medicines, vaccines, dietary supplements, and more. You can sign up here for free, to receive updates sent directly to your email: https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USFDA/signup/27726.

Consider Where You Store and Dispose Your Medicine

Do not store your medicine in your bathroom medicine cabinet. The irony of a "medicine cabinet" is that it is the worst place to keep medicines because the heat and humidity from bathing can break down the medicines and make them less effective. Medicines should be kept in a cool, dry, and secure area, up, away, and out of reach of children.

Keep medicines in their original containers. Many medicines look alike, so keeping them in their original containers, will ensure you know which is which and how to take them. Never mix tablets or capsules in one container. For example, some people have used a spare prescription medicine bottle to hold different medicines that are to be taken at the same time. People who have done this have accidently taken all the medicine from the wrong bottle. For example, if the person takes three different medicines at one time and put them in the spare medicine bottle, they may accidently pick up the medicine bottle that contains just one of the three medicines and therefore take three doses of the one kind of medicine.

Prevent child poisonings. Store medicines where children cannot see or reach them, such as in a locked box or high cabinet. When giving medicine to one child, keep the drug under close observation to prevent another child from accessing it. Be similarly vigilant when you are taking medicine. Immediately after use, return medicines to a secure location – up high and out of sight – without letting children see where you put them. For additional information and strategies to keep children safe from accidental overdose and poisoning, visit here.

Safely dispose expired and unused medicine. It is important to dispose of any unused or expired medicines safely and securely. In doing so, you can help avoid potential abuse, prevent accidental poisonings of children and pets, and protect the environment. To learn more about how you should dispose medicine please visit here.

Store medicine that may be needed in an emergency in a special location. Some medicines may be needed in an emergency, such as an Epi-Pen (epinephrine injection) to treat an allergic reaction or Narcan (naloxone) to treat an overdose of opioids. Store these emergency medicines in a safe location that is easy to find, but up and away from small children's reach. Let anyone who comes to the house, such as babysitters or grandparents, know where these medicines are stored. Be sure they know when and how to use them.

Measuring your medicine in a syringe. If you are prescribed medicine that must be measured in a syringe and injected, make sure you understand how to measure the correct dose. Practice using the syringe to measure a dose of the medicine in front of the pharmacist. Write down the medicine name, dose, device used (i.e., syringe type), and what marking the medicine should be drawn up to on the device.