

Frequently asked questions: Medication review

Should I ask my GP surgery for a medication review?

Lots of us take medicines, and some people worry about them. If you have concerns about your medicines, you can ask to meet with an expert to talk about them. Your doctor's surgery will arrange for you to see a pharmacist (chemist), doctor or nurse. This is usually called a 'medication review', and this guide will help you get the best from it.

If there is an urgent problem with medicines, don't wait for a medication review. If you have or somebody else has, any of the conditions on this list, don't delay:

- if you have taken too much of any medicine
- if you have an allergic reaction to a new medicine (such as wheezing, rash, swelling or fainting),
- if you notice a serious side effect or any unusual symptoms
- if you notice your health getting worse.

In any of these cases, talk to a doctor or pharmacist straight away.

What is a medication review?

A medication review is a meeting about on your medicines, with an expert – a pharmacist, doctor or nurse. There may be changes you want to suggest, worries that are bothering you or questions that you want answered. And the person you meet with may also have changes or questions to raise with you.

The meeting is free. The NHS recommends that all older people, and many others, have regular reviews of their medicines. You don't have to pay and it could end up improving your health, saving the NHS money, if you find you need fewer medicines than before.

Most people find that their meeting takes somewhere between 20 and 45 minutes. It depends on how much there is to talk about. It will be booked a few days in advance at a time to suit you.

The meeting is confidential. Whoever you talk to, the details will be kept private. You can talk openly and your questions or worries will be listened to. A note to say the meeting took place and to note any changes agreed as a result, will be put into your medical notes. So, whoever you meet with, your doctor will know what is happening.

Is it for me?

Some people should have review meetings at least every year:

- are you over 75?
- are you regularly taking prescription medicines?
- are you taking medicine for a long term illness (like asthma, arthritis, diabetes or epilepsy)?
- are you taking hospital-prescribed medicines, or have you come out of hospital lately?
- have there been major changes to your medicines recently?

If you fall into one of the groups above, you should be discussing your medicines regularly. Even if you're not in any of these groups, you can ask for a meeting if you have any concerns. Ask your GP surgery for a 'medication review'.

Who will I talk to?

- An expert in medicines. The person you meet to focus on your medicines will usually be a pharmacist, doctor or nurse.
- A good listener. They will be ready to listen to your worries and your questions.
- Someone you can be open with. You can say whatever you want in these meetings.

What will we talk about?

- Almost anything about medicines. Any question about your medicines is OK. However, these meetings are not usually the place to talk about other aspects of your health or your condition.
- Start with basic questions (how to take the medicine, what it's for). There's a list of suggested questions at the end of this section.
- How to take your medicines and how you're getting on with them. The person you meet with will have questions for you about this.
- Be honest about any concerns you have. A different medicine might make things easier.

When medicines cause problems

Taking medicines is often trouble-free, but there can be problems:

- It can be difficult to take medicines – for example, if they're hard to swallow.
- Some people end up taking lots of tablets at different times and find it difficult to remember what to take when.
- There are medicines which don't mix.
- Some people get side effects from one or more of their medicines.
- Some people have questions or worries about their medicines and don't know who to talk to.

Raise these or any other concerns at a medication review.

How should I prepare?

- Fill in a chart of the medicines you take, what they are for, how much you take and when you take them. Not just prescribed medicines
- Think about your questions, concerns and suggestions and write them down
- Make sure you know when, where and who you are meeting
- If you have special concerns about one medicine, bring it along. Otherwise, filling in the chart is usually enough.

What happens afterwards?

- The medicines you are prescribed may change. That will not happen against your will. You will need to agree on any changes.
- The person you talk to will make suggestions to your doctor.
- A summary of the meeting will be written into your medical notes.
- A date for the next meeting will usually be agreed at the end of the medication review.

How do you take your medicines?

A chart will help you remember when to take your medicines. It's only meant for medicines that you need to take regularly. So no need to write down anything you only take now and then (such as a headache tablet), unless there's a problem with it. However, if you are on medication, please discuss what pain killers you may take when if needed.

Please show the chart to anyone who prescribes for you, and take it to a review meeting. If anyone changes your medicine, ask them to change the chart as well so that there can be no confusion about your medicines. Take the chart with you to hospital if you have an appointment there or need to be readmitted and show it to anyone there who is prescribing medicine for you.

Medicine doesn't just mean tablets. When we use the word "medicine" here, it includes lots of things:

- Vitamins, herbal products or other supplements from the pharmacy, health shop or supermarket
- Over the counter medicines, like painkillers or cough syrup
- Liquid medicines or tonics
- Creams and ointments
- Inhalers or other devices

Questions you could ask

These are just suggestions. We've left some space for you to write your own questions below. Or you may want to write on a separate sheet, which you can use for writing down the answers as well.

- What does this medicine do?
- How and when should I take it?
- How do I know it's helping?
- How can I be sure it's safe for me to take it?
- What side effects are most likely from this medicine?
- What should I do if I get these effects?
- Could another medicine do a better job, with less risk?
- What if I stopped taking it, or took a lower dose?
- How does this mix with other things I take, or with food and drink?
- How long will I need to use this medicine?
- Will the medicine build up in my body?
- Do I really need to take all these medicines?
- Is there anything that can help to remind me to take my medicines?
- Can I have easier to open containers?

Source: NHS Direct