



## Changing the Conversation About Side Effects



### Questions Your Health Care Provider Will Welcome

Drugs are not prescribed casually. When your health care provider prescribes a medicine, it's after an examination and a discussion of your symptoms and history. Your health care provider determines a medical recommendation based on years of education and experience. Many times, drugs save lives.

Drugs should only be used when necessary. Your health care provider is there to identify any medical conditions that need treatment and to make recommendations. The decision for what medical course you take is yours.

All drugs have side effects. That includes over-the-counter drugs and homeopathic and Asian medicines. Discuss with your health care provider the risks and benefits of the medicine prescribed. Remember to ask about both the short-term and the long-term risks. Many drugs have not been tested for long-term adverse outcomes. That is a risk factor to consider. You may come to the decision to use the drug because it is necessary today. That is your choice as an informed patient.

#### Questions to discuss with your health care provider

##### Why am I being prescribed this drug/medicine?

- Should I take the brand name or the generic?
- Is this drug better than similar ones? Is there a specific benefit this drug offers more than the competition?
- Has the FDA approved this drug for this condition, or is it being prescribed off-label? (The FDA might have approved the drug for safety in use for one condition, doctors are allowed to prescribe it for another condition.)

##### Will this drug cure what I have or just change the symptoms?

- Are there other options to consider like homeopathic or Asian medicines, acupuncture, chiropractic? How about watchful waiting?

##### What are the immediate side effects of this drug?

- Will this drug interact with food or alcohol? How about vitamin supplements or herbal medicines?
- Will this drug interact with any of the other drugs I'm taking?

##### Do we know the long-term effects of this drug? Have there been studies?

- How long has the drug been used?
- What happens with longer use? Could I develop a tolerance (requiring increasing the dosage) or an allergy? Can it become toxic?
- Could changes the drug makes in my body today result in an adverse outcome years later?

If this medicine doesn't work, what is the next step?

Are there any other questions I should be asking?

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