

Taking CARE

Woman #1: Chronic pain totally changed my life. Now I research all my medications online. But with all the contradictory information and errors out there, I don't know what to trust.

Man #1: I live alone but I see plenty of folks...mostly doctors. They've got me on so many pills that keeping them straight just seems hopeless. I need some sort of specialist just to keep track of these pills.

NARRATOR: It can be overwhelming, trying to manage your medications. But did you know that you already have a specialist in medication management on your healthcare team? It's your pharmacist. Your pharmacist has two key responsibilities. First is the accurate and responsible dispensing of medications. About twelve and a half percent (12.5%) of all prescriptions filled in the United States are for pain medications, so your pharmacist is very familiar with them. The second is caring for you. In a recent survey, eighty-one (81%) of pharmacists said they would like to speak more to people about their pain and treatment options. Your pharmacist is available and eager to help you. In fact, your pharmacist is an important member of your healthcare team.

Monica Skomo, B.S., PharmD, BCACP:

The pharmacist has a very important role in helping patients with pain. The pharmacist is a medication expert and he or she can talk to patients about the different medications, what they're for, how they work the best, what sort of side effects that you may experience from the medications.

The pharmacist is an excellent way to be an advocate for you with your doctor. So the pharmacist can serve as a go-between between you and your doctor. The pharmacist and the doctor talk in the same sort of language. So you can communicate your concerns to the pharmacist, or the pharmacist may have some concerns about your medications or any sort of side effects that you may be experiencing, or maybe the pharmacist is concerned that your medication isn't working appropriately. So the pharmacist can talk to your physician or talk to your doctor or your prescriber about these issues. And the pharmacist and your doctor can come up with an appropriate plan to help you.

In order to become a pharmacist, you must go through a lot of training. So first and foremost, you must go to pharmacy school. And pharmacy school is six years long. During that period of time, you need to take and complete internship hours, so you're working in pharmacies, and you're working in different places in order to gain additional experience. Then after you graduate pharmacy school, in order to become a licensed pharmacist, you need to pass a Board exam. So there's a lot of training and a lot of education that goes into it.

Woman #1: Last time I was in, the pharmacist questioned the timing of one of my refills. Why would she do that?

Gretchen Kreckel Garofoli, PharmMD:

It's not that your pharmacist thinks that you're doing anything wrong. Pharmacists are required by law to submit information to both Federal and State programs. These are all put in place to keep our patients safe. The pharmacist really cares about you and your welfare and needs to keep you safe with the medications that you're taking.

NARRATOR: The best way to begin a relationship with your pharmacist is to talk to him or her. Here are some tips for getting started:

- **First, make sure you use one pharmacy for all your medications. More than ninety percent (90%) of people do, and using one pharmacy can help you avoid harmful drug interactions;**
- **Let the pharmacist know about all your medical conditions, not just pain. Tell him or her about all of the medications and treatments you are using, including over-the-counter medications and dietary supplements;**
- **Ask how the medication should be taken, time of day, with or without food, and things to avoid when taking it;**
- **Ask what you can expect when taking the medication, including the amount of relief you can expect, and any side effects to look out for;**
- **And finally, ask if there are additional ways you can manage your pain beyond your medications.**

Monica Skomo, B.S., PharmD, BCACP:

It's very important to take some time when choosing a pharmacist. There are several things that you can think about when you're choosing a pharmacist. One of the most important things is someone who's going to take time with you, and also someone that you feel comfortable with and that you can develop a good relationship with.

The primary thing that a pharmacist wants to do is to help patients. They want to help their patients with pain. They want to be patients' advocate. They want to help to be able to protect their patients and make sure that they're not having any sort of adverse effects, or that their medications don't harm them. Pharmacists don't want medications to harm their patients. They want medications to help people with pain.

NARRATOR: To help you get the most from your relationship with your pharmacist, the ACPA and the American Pharmacists Association have developed the CARE card. CARE stands for what every good pharmacist strives to be: Compassionate, Accurate, Responsive, and Educational. It covers how to take, store, and dispose of your medications. You and your pharmacist can use this card to make sure you understand and remember all of the important information you need. On the back, you'll find useful numbers and websites that can help you, too.

Let's see the CARE card in action, helping the consumer and pharmacist work together.

Pharmacist (at counter): Hello.

Man #2 (Patient): Hi. I'm here to pick up my medicine, and I need to talk to you about how to take it.

Pharmacist: Is that a CARE card?

Man #2: Yes.

Pharmacist: Great! Let's fill it out together. Now, this med should be taken twice a day (circles two icons), on an empty stomach, so let me circle that (circles an icon). I'm going to add that you need to drink a full glass of water with it (circles an icon). You may experience some dry mouth. Do you have any other questions?

Man #2: No, but if I do?

Pharmacist: You can call or come in. I'd be happy to talk with you. I've put our number right there. (She gives him the CARE card and his prescription.)

Man #2: Thanks. Now I need to find something to take care of this cold, and I'm outta here.

Pharmacist: You know, a lot of over-the-counter medications used to be prescription only. Some are quite powerful. I'd like to make sure it's safe for you to take these medications together. Follow me.

Man #2: Oh, okay!

Man #1: I am so glad I had a talk with my pharmacist. And with the CARE card, I feel more confident that I'm taking my medications the way I should and storing them safely. And I like the pictures. Even if your eyesight's not so good, the card is easy to understand.

Woman #1: Now that my pharmacist and I are talking more, I know we're on the same page about my medications. I feel better about what I'm taking because we've talked it over.

NARRATOR: Having chronic pain is a challenge. It's important to have a team of skilled professionals to back you up. A key member of that team is close at hand, right behind the pharmacy counter. Your pharmacist is ready and eager to help you. So talk to your pharmacist and use the CARE card to make sure you take the right thing at the right time in the right way.