

From the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) Office of Medical Programs

Medication Information for the Commercial Driver

How to Read a Prescription Label

It is critical to know how medication could make you feel and how it can impact your driving ability and routine. Many people receive a prescription and do not fully understand their medication. When your doctor writes you a prescription, it is very important to ask the six basic questions about the medication:

1. Why am I taking this medication?
2. How much should I take?
3. When should I take it?
4. How should I take it?
5. What should I do if I miss a dose?
6. What are the possible side effects?

If you are a commercial motor vehicle driver, you also need to know how the medication will affect your ability to drive. Receiving answers to these questions will help you gain a better understanding of how to read your prescription label(s).

Remember to verify your name and address on the prescription label. Also, verify the prescription number, medication name, instructions on how to take the medicine, and the name of the doctor who wrote the prescription. Most importantly, know how the medicine could make you feel and how it could affect your daily driving routine. Staying safe is an essential part of managing your health.

Medication Interactions

Did you know medication interactions can occur when you take two or more medications at one time or on the same day? It doesn't matter whether the medication is prescribed, over-the-counter, or herbal. Interactions can increase or decrease the effectiveness of your medications. When medications interact with chemicals found in the body, in food, from medical tests, can cause you to experience serious side effects not normally linked with either drug. These interactions may affect you in many ways possibly altering the effects of other medications and could adversely affect pre-existing medical conditions.

For instance, blood pressure medications may cause side effects associated with food intake. If you eat or drink grapefruit products while taking certain blood pressure medications, you may experience an increased heart rate or blood pressure changes and/or increased side effects such as facial flushing, headache, or dizziness. Therefore, it is important to inform your health care provider of any over-the-counter medications you may be taking.

So how can you evaluate your medication interactions to determine if they are major, moderate, or minor?

Read labels. Some medication labels have warnings. These labels may note foods to avoid while taking the medication or the label may say do not take a specific medication in combination with other medications.

Speak to your doctor. In some cases, recommendations from your physician can manage your interactions. Because it may be harmful to a commercial driver's ability to drive safely, it is important to be aware of possible interactions between medications.

Sharing Medications

Share a cab. Share your food. Share joy! But don't share medications. Sharing medications, even over-the-counter medications like aspirin, can be a prescription for disaster.

Side effects and drug interactions: Although it is common for family and friends to share medications, the medication prescribed for you may cause serious problems for others with bad side effects such as severe allergic reactions and unhealthy interactions with another prescription medication that is being taken. In fact, sharing one medication may decrease the effectiveness of another medication. The medication you share may work with other prescriptions to double the potency and cause a reaction similar to an overdose. Even herbal and dietary supplements can do this.

Not all symptoms are alike! You may think the symptoms your friend is suffering are the same as yours, but he or she may have a very different medical problem. By sharing your medication, you may be delaying his or her trip to a doctor, and may even contribute to the worsening of a medical condition. Sharing medication with someone is like diagnosing and treating him or her. You wouldn't expect your doctor to get into the cab of your truck and drive it without any training, so don't try to diagnose and treat your friends. It is a dangerous practice!

Unique responses: We are unique and so are our reactions to medications. You have heard the statement, *"I can take that medication and not be the least bit drowsy, but my sister falls asleep two minutes after swallowing it."* Our body chemistry, composition, and how fast our liver works to clear medications out of our system are evidence of our differences, and those factors play a role in medication use. So just because a medication works for you doesn't mean it will work the same for someone else.

Unsafe and illegal: Medications, particularly those that have a narcotic component, may be habit-forming and may pose a severe risk to safe driving. Side effects such as drowsiness, dizziness, and confusion have a direct impact on the focus, concentration, and stamina needed for commercial driving. Thus, sharing a medication with another driver can cause serious public safety concerns. It's illegal to share prescriptions with other people. Doctor prescribed medications are strong, even some antibiotics can cause serious reactions, that's why they have unique numbers for writing prescription orders. Your good intentions may cause dangerous results to health and safety while on or off the road – especially if they are unaware of how the medication will affect them. So be safe, don't share.

Conversations You Should Have with Your Doctor

As a Commercial Motor Vehicle (CMV) driver, you know you are driving a vehicle that is capable of causing serious harm. You understand that you are equally responsible for the safety of others, and driving a CMV is very different from driving a personal vehicle. It takes skill, knowledge, and a certain level of physical fitness beyond what is required for a passenger car. As a CMV driver, you need to talk to your doctor about the type of work you do and the physical qualification requirements you must meet to safely operate a CMV. Here are some questions and issues to help in this discussion with your doctor.

- 1) Tell your doctor what you do, job responsibilities, and the tasks you perform.** Be sure to include the driving and non-driving tasks, such as the inspections, load redistribution, the need to apply chains, etc. By doing this, your doctor will be able to make a better assessment of your health and performance of your job.
- 2) Ask what affects your injury or illness will have on your job.** What are the direct and indirect impacts on your ability to perform all driving and non-driving tasks safely?
- 3) Ask about your treatment.** Specifically, ask what you must undergo to relieve the symptoms or treat the disease and how the treatment may impact your ability to drive a CMV safely.
- 4) Talk to your doctor about alternative treatments.** Ask about equally effective alternate treatments that will not have an adverse impact on safe driving. Would any of these fit your driving requirements better?
- 5) Ask about the medications your doctor prescribes.** Will the side effects cause sleepiness, fatigue, drowsiness, lack of focus or concentration, or a decreased reaction time? Will the side effects interfere with safe driving?
- 6) Inform your doctor of the medications you are taking.** Identify prescription, non-prescription, dietary supplements, or herbal remedies, and discuss whether the medications will interact and cause any unsafe side effects. Some medications can interact with one another to cause serious adverse reactions and interfere with the effectiveness of another medication. Don't let your treatment be undone because your medication doesn't work properly!
- 7) Discuss the extent of treatment and how long you must take your medication.**
- 8) Ask what you can do to improve your chances for recovery.** Simple changes like, losing weight, exercising, stop smoking, drinking more water, improving your eating habits, or getting more sleep can make great improvements in your overall health.

Remember, you are an expert in your work and your doctor is an expert in his field. When you put your knowledge together, you can come up with a plan designed to meet your individual needs and keep you and those who share the road with you, safe.

Adapted from FMCSA Driver Medical Fitness for Duty Pages at
www.fmcsa.dot.gov/rules-regulations/topics/medical/Medical-Programs.aspx#Prescription.