

# Prescription Medicines and Your Child

There are 2 types of medicines you can buy: 1) over-the-counter (OTC) medicines and 2) prescription medicines. OTC medicines are those you can buy without a doctor's order. Prescription medicines are those you can only buy with a doctor's order (a prescription). This handout is about prescription medicines.

## Ask the Doctor or Pharmacist

Many parents have questions about their children's prescription medicines. Labels can be hard to read and understand. But it's important to give medicines the right way for your child's health and safety.

Before you give your child any medicine, be sure you know how to use them. Here are some questions you can ask the doctor or **pharmacist\***:

- How will this medicine help my child?
- How much medicine do I give my child? When? For how long?
- Should my child take this medicine with food or on an empty stomach?
- Are there any **side effects\*** from this medicine?
- How can I learn more about this medicine?
- When will the medicine begin to work?
- What should I do if my child misses a dose?
- What if my child spits it out?
- Can this prescription be refilled? If so, how many times?

Also, always tell your child's doctor:

- If your child is taking any other medicines (even OTC medicines) and
- If your child has any reactions to the medicines.



## Call the Doctor Right Away If...

...your child throws up a lot or gets a rash after taking any medicine. Even if a medicine is safe for other children, your child may be **allergic\*** to it.

Your child *may or may not* have side effects with any drug. Be sure to tell the doctor if your child has any side effects with a medicine.

## Read the Label

Here is what the parts of a prescription label mean. (See example on second page of this handout.)

- a. Prescription number.** Your pharmacy will ask for this number when you call for a refill.
- b. Your child's name.**
- c. Name of the medicine.** Make sure this matches what your child's doctor told you. The strength of the medicine may also be listed (for example, 10 mg tablets).
- d. QTY.** "Quantity" or how much is in the package.
- e. Expiration date (Mfr Exp).** The medicine in this package will only work until this date. Throw away any medicine left after this date.

## \* Words to Know

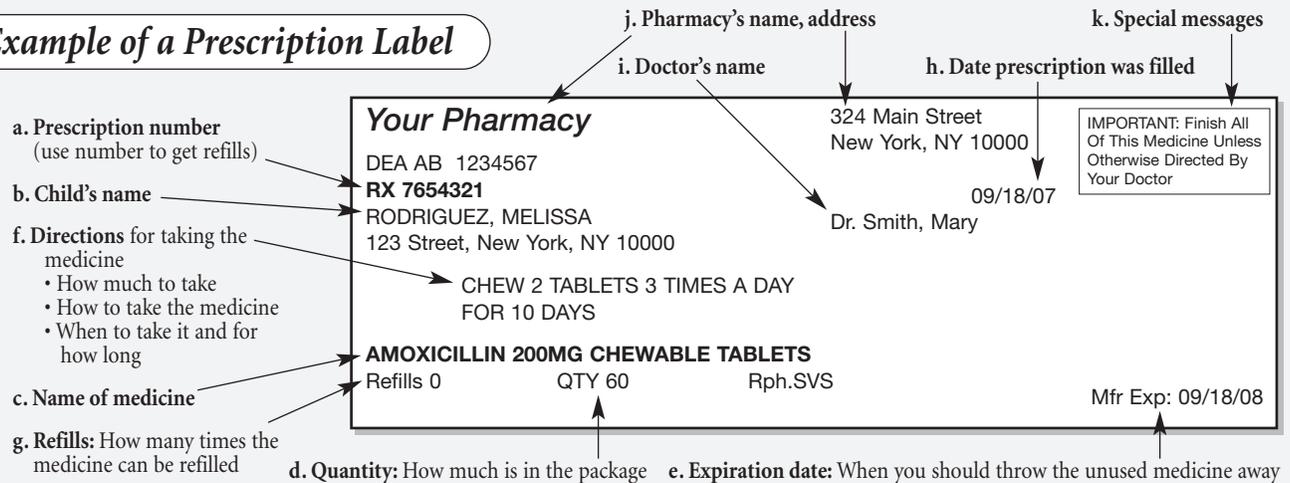
**allergic** (uh-LER-jik)—to have a bad reaction to something that doesn't bother most people. For example, some people may get hives if they are stung by a bee.

**pharmacist** (FARM-uh-sist)—a person who has special training to fill prescriptions and teach people about their medicines.

**side effects**—symptoms that come from taking a drug and are not part of the treatment. For example, some medicines can make you feel sick to your stomach.

*Continued on back*

### Example of a Prescription Label



**f. Directions.** This tells you how your child needs to take the medicine and what it is for. The label should match what your child's doctor told you.

Here are some examples:

- **"Take 4 times a day."** Give the medicine to your child 4 times during the day. For example, at breakfast, lunch, dinner, and before bed.
- **"Take every 4 hours."** Give the medicine to your child every 4 hours. This adds up to 6 times in a 24-hour period. For example, 6:00 am, 10:00 am, 2:00 pm, 6:00 pm, 10:00 pm, and 2:00 am. Most medicines don't have to be given at the exact time to work, but some do.
- **"Take as needed as symptoms persist."** Give the medicine to your child only when needed.
- **"Take with food."** Give the medicine to your child after a meal. This is for medicines that work better when the stomach is full.

**g. Refills.** The label will show the number of refills you can get. "No refills—Dr. authorization required" or "0" means you need to call your child's doctor if you need more. The doctor may want to check your child before ordering more medicine.

**h. Date prescription was filled.**

**i. Doctor's name.**

**j. Pharmacy's name, address.**

**k. Special messages.** The medicine may have extra bright-colored labels with special messages. For example, you may see, "Keep refrigerated," "Shake well before using," or "May cause drowsiness." Be sure to ask if you don't understand what they mean.

### Tips

- **Use safety caps.** Always use child-resistant caps.
- **Store medicines in a locked, childproof cupboard** if you have children at home.
- **Store medicines in a cool, dry place.** Wetness can hurt medicines. So don't store them in a bathroom. Some medicines need to be kept in a refrigerator.
- **Never let your child take medicine alone.** Don't call medicine "candy." (If you do, your child may try to eat some when you're not around.)
- **Watch your child carefully.** Children can find medicine where you least expect it. Your child might find it in a visitor's purse or at other people's homes. On moving day, medicines and poisons may be out where children can find them.

To learn more, visit the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Web site at [www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org).

Your child's doctor will tell you to do what's best for your child. This information should not take the place of talking with your child's doctor.

Adaptation of the AAP information in this handout into plain language was supported in part by McNeil Consumer Healthcare.

© 2008 American Academy of Pediatrics

American Academy  
of Pediatrics



DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™