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DOCTORS, PHARMACISTS PARTNERS IN YOUR CARE

How to Synchronize your Refills and Bubble-Pack your Prescriptions

If you or a family member takes multiple prescribed medications, it can be a major task to safely manage proper dosages, dosing schedules, and refills. Retail pharmacies have developed services like medication reviews and reconciliation and bubble packaging to help individuals and families safely manage their prescriptions.

Jeff Cushman, a pharmacist at Hometown Pharmacy in Neenah, knows these services can significantly increase patient safety, convenience, and cost-savings. Some pharmacies perform these services for free, and others charge a relatively small fee. “We can help people with complex medication schedules or those who simply have trouble remembering to take one or two pills,” he said. People talk to their doctor or pharmacist about getting help with three things:

1. **Consolidate all of your prescriptions to one pharmacy.** This is very important. Your pharmacist is a member of your health care team, and he or she must be aware of all drugs and supplements you are taking to be able to advise you about possible drug interactions or side effects. If you are using more than one pharmacy, no one pharmacist has a complete picture of your situation. As physicians, we partner with pharmacists and rely on them to contact us with concerns and suggestions about your prescriptions. If necessary, we work together to develop alternatives to address these concerns.
2. **Ask for a process called medication review and reconciliation, when your pharmacist will update and organize all of your medications.** You bring in all your medicine bottles from all of your prescribers and your pharmacist will work with you and your doctors to set up the best dosing schedule for you. Your pharmacist will contact all of your doctors, determine if certain medicines are better taken during the day or at night, and set up your first fill so that all your refills are timed together, automatically, without your having to call each month. “This is a great convenience, because you won’t have different refill date for different prescriptions. You make just one trip to the pharmacy each month—or better yet, have them delivered to your house,” Cushman said.
3. **Request bubble packaging for anything from single prescriptions to complex medication combinations.** Keep better track of whether or not you remembered to take your pills by simply checking whether or not the bubble pack for that dose is empty. Patients and their family members also save a lot of time and worry because they no longer have to count and sort pills into those pesky weekly pill sorters or make multiple trips to the pharmacy at different times of the month to pick up refills. (After medication reconciliation, all of your refills will occur on the same date so that your bubble packs can be prepared.) Even over-the-counter (OTC) medicine and supplements can be included, but you have to ask your prescriber to write a prescription for them. This gives your pharmacist permission to open the packages and generate the necessary labels for you.



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Here is some more information about bubble packaging, when pills are packaged and labeled by individual dose. Depending on the pharmacy you use, there are different formats; however, they are all effective at keeping you safe, organized, and in compliance with your prescription's dosage instructions.

Weekly packs, also known as 7-day cards, are when multiple pills are packaged together by the time of day they are taken. For instance, morning pills will be in one easy-to-open foil-backed bubble, and noon, evening, and bedtime doses are similarly prepared. The customer starts a new set of packaged meds each week.

Calendar cards include up to 31 days of doses of a particular medication or combination of medications. Patients may have multiple cards if they take multiple doses per day.

Depending on the equipment your pharmacy has, you may also see **strip packaging**, which is simply a different method of sorting and labeling your doses with your name, time of dose, and a listing of each medicine that is inside each single-dose packet.

Safe medication management is dependent on your pharmacist knowing about every medicine you take. When you consolidate all your prescriptions to one pharmacy, this opens the door to helpful services like bubble packaging and better communication with all of your prescribers. That's an easy pill to swallow!

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