

Medication Safety

Suggestions on what to discuss with your health care providers to help you receive high-quality care

Ontario Health is committed to improving the quality of health care in the province in partnership with patients, health care professionals, and other organizations.

To do that, Ontario Health develops quality standards that set out important steps to improve care, such as our quality standard on medication safety. These standards are based on current evidence and input from an expert committee that includes patients, health care professionals, and researchers.

This patient guide accompanies the quality standard on medication safety, which outlines the top five areas to improve care for people taking one or more medications. The patient guide also includes suggestions on what to discuss with your health care providers, as well as helpful resources. You can download the complete [quality standard here](#).

If you're interested in reading other patient guides that discuss medications, see our patient guides [Going Home From the Hospital](#), [Opioid Prescribing for Acute Pain](#), [Opioid Prescribing for Chronic Pain](#), and [condition-specific patient guides](#).

Below is a summary of the top five areas to improve care for people taking one or more medications.



Quality Statement 1: Involvement in Decisions About Medication

What the standard says

People (or their substitute decision-makers) are involved in making informed decisions about their medications.

What this means for you

- Every time a decision needs to be made about your medication (for example, starting, using less, stopping, or changing a medication), the person prescribing your medication should ask if you and your family or caregiver would like to be involved in that decision.
- If you want to be involved, they should give you information that is easy for you to understand so that you can make the decision together.
- They should talk with you about any concerns you have about your medication, the reason for taking it, how long you would need to take it, when to take it, possible harms (including side effects and drug interactions), and the cost.



A substitute decision-maker is a person who makes care and treatment decisions on your behalf if or when you can't make those decisions for yourself.



Quality Statement 2: Prescribing Practices

What the standard says

Prescriptions are sent to the dispensing pharmacy via e-prescribing software embedded in the patient's electronic medical record, which allows for two-way communication between the prescriber and the pharmacist. Effective clinical decision support systems are used to aid prescribing.

What this means for you

- To make sure your prescription is correct, the person who prescribes your medication should talk with you about what medications are being started, changed, or stopped. Then, they should send your prescription electronically to the pharmacy you choose.
- They should offer you a copy of the prescription.
- If you can, use one pharmacy for all your prescriptions. That way, the pharmacist can check for possible drug interactions and allergies.



Quality Statement 3: Accurate and Up-to-Date Medication List

What the standard says

An accurate and up-to-date list of medications is available to people taking medication (and their families and caregivers, as appropriate) and to relevant health care professionals.

What this means for you

- You (and any family members or caregivers, if you choose) should be offered an accurate, up-to-date list of all your medications.
- The list should include information about what each medication is for, the dosage, when to take them, and how to use them. Your health care providers should involve you in creating and updating this list.
- They should also make sure you understand the medications you are taking and talk with you about any questions and concerns you have.
- Keep a copy of your medication list with you (for example, in your wallet or on your mobile phone) and share it with any health care providers who help you manage your medications.
- Take any medications you don't need or that are expired to a pharmacy for safe disposal.



Quality Statement 4: Structured Medication Review

What the standard says

People taking medication have structured medication reviews, especially during health care visits when medications are a major component of their care, or as clinically indicated.

What this means for you

- Your health care professionals should regularly review your medications with you. If it's been a while since your last review, you can ask for one.
- If you have more than one health care professional prescribing medications for you, they should work together.
- Your health care professionals should talk with you about what medications you are taking and why, and whether your medications are working. They should discuss how to reduce the risk of side effects or errors, and tell you what to do if you forget to take your medication.
- Together you can decide if you need all your medications or if any can be safely stopped. You can also talk about how to manage any symptoms you may experience while slowing or stopping medication.



Quality Statement 5: Medication-Related Patient Safety Incidents

What the standard says

Patients, caregivers, health care providers, and organizations recognize, report, and learn from medication-related patient safety incidents. Health care providers and organizations support a patient safety culture that is person-centred, just, and trusting.

What this means for you

- Your health care providers should talk with you about how to recognize errors or reactions related to your medication. (A reaction is an unwanted side effect that happens when you take your medication as directed.)
- They should give you information about how to ask for help or report an error or reaction. This information should let you know who to contact and tell you about the role of patient advocates.
- You can report errors through the Institute for Safe Medication Practices Canada's [Medication Error Reporting](#) and reactions to Health Canada's [MedEffect Canada](#) program.
- If a mistake is made related to your medication, you and your family should be included in the process to review this mistake. The outcome of this review and any improvements made should be shared with you.

Suggestions on what to discuss with your health care providers to help you receive high-quality care

Ask the care team:

- Can you provide me with a list of my medications?
- Who will be involved in reviewing my medications, and what are their roles?
- Who should I contact if I have questions about my medication?
- Are there tools available to help keep medications organized, such as dosettes or blister packs, calendar checklists, or cell phone apps with medication reminders?

The Institute for Safe Medication Practices Canada suggests [5 questions to ask about your medications](#):

- Changes?** Have any medications been added, stopped, or changed, and why?
- Continue?** What medications do I need to keep taking, and why?
- Proper use?** How do I take my medications, and for how long?
- Monitor?** How will I know my medication is working, and what side effects do I watch for?
- Follow-up?** Do I need any tests and when do I book my next visit?

Share with the care team:

- All the medications you're taking, regularly or as needed. This includes prescription and over-the-counter medications, vitamins and minerals, herbal products, traditional medicines, pills, liquids, creams, patches, puffers, and eye and ear drops
- About any concerns you have about your condition or medication
- If you notice any side effects or had to stop a medication previously because of a side effect or reaction
- If you don't understand why you're taking a medication or how to take it
- If there are things that make it hard to take your medication, such as the cost or difficulty using it
- About any medication you have started taking or stopped taking
- Who you want to include in decisions about your medications (like a family member or friend)

If you're a caregiver:

You might have your own questions. It can help to identify yourself as the patient's caregiver to their health care team. This will make sure they know and respect your questions and concerns.

- Let them know what your role will be in helping the patient manage their medications
- Let them know if you need help

Learn more

1. [One Simple Solution for Medication Safety](#): a video by Dr. Mike Evans that helps you learn about keeping a list of your medications
2. [SafeMedicationUse.ca](#): information and resources about using medication safely and preventing and reporting a medication error
3. [Knowledge is the Best Medicine](#): tools to help you keep track of your medications
4. MyMedRec: a free app to keep track of the medications you or your family are taking, available on [Apple](#) and [Android](#) devices
5. For Kids: [5 Questions to Ask About My Medicines](#)

Need more information?

If you have any questions or feedback about this guide, please contact us at QualityStandards@OntarioHealth.ca or 1-877-280-8538 (TTY: 1-800-855-0511).