

Ten Tips To Help You Stay Adherent To Your Medication

Medication non-adherence is a worldwide issue costing taxpayers avoidable dollars. Although research has been done to address the problem, we are still far from finding a “one solution fits all”.

A recent campaign encouraging patients to bring their unwanted medications into the pharmacy resulted in **two tonnes** of returned medications! While this has been considered a success, I can't help but wonder where this is coming from?

Even if we account for medications prescribed for short-term conditions like pain or heartburn, the majority has to come from patients not taking their medications prescribed for chronic conditions.

Medication adherence has been an interest area for me for years now, and seeing as Henderson Discount Pharmacy has a large number of chronic patients, I have made it my mission to implement strategies to help these patients stay compliant. We offer reminder calls/ text messaging for prescriptions, follow-up phone calls, compliance packaging and home deliveries ... we do it all, and I am sure it helps to some degree.

However, it is what happens **after** the medication has been dispensed and is in your home ... that is **the most important** factor to your health's future.

Taking multiple medications several times a day can be **hard**. Just ask anyone who is not on medication regularly and has to take antibiotics every eight hours! You will find they will have forgotten to take their medication at least once during the course of treatment. Imagine having to do that for a lifetime.

That is why I have an enormous amount of compassion for patients managing a long-term condition. It takes a lot more than willingness and opportunity to do it well.

So if you are struggling to manage your medication regime for a long-term condition, here are 10 tips which may help in your medication journey:

1. ***First and foremost, accept that you might need help.*** If you are not sure, ask yourself these two questions:
 - Do I have left over medications when I get my new supply?
 - Do I have a surplus of multiple medications in my house?

2. ***If you answered “yes” to either of the questions above, then try to look at the problem with curiosity and not judgement.*** Practice self-compassion when you search for clues and be honest about it. If it helps, write a medication diary for a week or two and see if there are any patterns.
3. ***Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about it.*** Believe it or not, neither of them are going to judge you or think badly of you if you ask for help. In fact, they will appreciate you coming to them, as it helps them to understand the possible failure of your treatment. It also allows them to address what is really happening and they may even provide you with an alternative you are not currently aware of.
4. ***Ask your doctor to simplify your regimen.*** Look at the times you mostly miss your medication and ask your doctor if you could take your medication at some other time of day, when it is more convenient for you.
5. ***Look at your daily routine and try to match taking your medications when you do other things regularly,*** like brushing your teeth or eating a meal.
6. ***Set an alarm to remind you.*** Sometimes the simple answer is a reminder from your phone that it's time to take your medication. If you have a busy schedule and you always have your phone nearby, try this before anything else.
7. ***If the tips above fail, ask your pharmacist to medico (blister) package your medications.*** They are set with dates and times, which can be easily learned and followed. And yes, they are for people of all ages and not just for forgetful people! If you have a busy schedule, this could be a highly effective solution for you.
8. ***The best planning in the world will not work if you make a deliberate choice not to take your medications.*** Sometimes it may be difficult to understand why you choose not to take your medications. If you are unsure, one thing you can try is to assess the feelings you have towards taking your medication. Is it anger, frustration, disappointment? Or gratitude, acceptance and hope? Your answer to this (you don't have to share it with anyone) can help you to build an understanding of why you feel the way you feel.
9. ***Find out more about the medications you have been prescribed from your pharmacist,*** and ask them to write the condition on your label to help you memorise it. Knowing why you are taking your medication can make a huge difference. You can build on your initial knowledge and ask your doctor or

pharmacist something new about your medication, to help you avoid side effects and maximise success.

10. ***I left this one for last as I think it is the most important. Ask yourself WHY you are taking your medication.*** This is not the same “why” as the previous tip, but a personal one ... it is the reason for which you are taking your medication. What you are hoping it will do for you? For example “ I can be at my son’s wedding” or “ I can play tennis without pain” or “ I can see my grandchildren grow up”. Take a pen and paper and start writing as many things as you can think of. When you are finished, place it somewhere you can see it every day, like on the door of your fridge. This will keep you motivated on the days when you don’t feel like taking your medication.

Stay tuned for new tips ... and remember, there is always a pharmacy door open for you when you need help!

Timea Venter