

Medicines use review: Understand your medicines



Meet with your pharmacist to talk about:

- The medicines you are taking
- What they do
- How well they work for you
- How to get the most out of them



What this guide is for

You may have been invited by your pharmacist to a meeting to talk about your medicines. This is called a **“medicines use review”**.

If you have questions about your medicines, you can also ask for a medicines use review meeting yourself.

This guide will give you the information you need and help you get the best from your review meeting.

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What a medicines use review is

A medicines use review is an appointment with a pharmacist to focus on how you are getting on with your medicines. It usually takes place in your local pharmacy (chemist). It is an NHS service – you don't need to pay for it.

The meeting is to:

- **Help you to find out more about the medicines you are taking.**
- **Pick up any problems you are having with your medicines.**
- **Improve the effectiveness of your medicines.**
There may be easier ways to take them, or you may find you need fewer medicines than before.
- **Get better value for the NHS** – making sure that your medicines are right for you prevents unnecessary waste.

The pharmacist you meet with will have questions to ask you, and may suggest changes to your medicines. You may have concerns or questions that you want to ask. You can ask anything at all about your medicines.

Remember you can ask your pharmacist questions at any time, but a review will give you both more time to concentrate on you and your medicines.

How you may be offered a review

Your pharmacist might invite you for a review – either in person or in a letter through the post

You can ask for a review at your local pharmacy where you get your prescription medicines. You must have been getting your prescriptions there for three months or more.

Not every local pharmacy will be offering this service and those that do will only be able to provide a certain number of reviews.

In your area there may have been a local decision to make certain diseases or groups of people a priority. That may mean you may not get a review immediately.



“I wanted to know how my tablets worked, and how long I might need to stay on them. I felt comfortable asking the pharmacist, knowing they are properly trained.”

Is a medicines use review for you?

You can ask for a medicines use review if:

- You are regularly taking more than one prescription medicine.
- You are taking medicines for a long term illness (like asthma, arthritis, diabetes or epilepsy).

Your pharmacist will be happy to arrange a review meeting, and may even suggest it. Your doctor or nurse might also suggest that a review would be helpful.

Even if you're not in either of these groups, you can ask your pharmacist for advice at any time.

If there is an urgent problem with medicines, don't wait for a medicines use review.

If you, or somebody else, notice one of the things on this list, don't delay.

- ***If you have taken too much of any medicine***
- ***If you have an allergic reaction to a new medicine (such as wheezing, rash, swelling or fainting)***
- ***If you notice a serious side effect or any unusual symptoms***
- ***If you notice your health getting worse.***

In any of these cases, talk to a doctor or pharmacist straight away.

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What you can expect in the review meeting

All the pharmacists who offer this particular service will have been assessed to make sure they have the right knowledge and skills.

The meeting is confidential

- **There will be a private area within the pharmacy**, where you can sit down together and can't be overheard by customers or staff.
- **Your details, and your discussion, will be kept private.** You can talk openly and your questions or worries will be listened to. Only you and your GP will normally receive a record of the meeting.

The pharmacist will listen and help

- **They will be ready to hear your concerns and your questions.** You can be open with them and say whatever you want in these meetings.
- **Your pharmacist will only know about the medicines you have received from that pharmacy.** They will not have a record of prescriptions you've picked up from another pharmacy, medicines prescribed by a hospital, medicines bought without a prescription, or herbal medicines. They will not have your medical history or details about your illness. So it's important to tell them as much as you can.

You will be given an Action Plan

- The pharmacist will fill in a form to say the meeting took place and to record what was agreed during the meeting.
- The form is called the **Medicines Use Review Action Plan** and you will receive a copy at the end of the meeting.
- A copy will also go to your GP to be put into your medical notes.
- You can ask for a copy to be sent to another health professional involved in your care – for example, your district nurse – or to your carer. You may think it will be useful for them to know about your review.



"I haven't been for a yearly check-up for ages, not since I had the extra inhaler. Perhaps I should go for a review."

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How you might prepare

- **Make a note of all the medicines you take by filling in the chart** on pages 8-9. If you have concerns about particular medicines or have any medicines which you no longer use, bring them along.
- **Think about your questions, concerns and suggestions**, see pages 14-15, and write them down.
- **Make sure you know when, where and who** you are meeting.



When medicines cause problems

Taking medicines is often trouble-free, but there can be problems:

- *It can be difficult to take medicines – for example, if they're hard to swallow*
- *Some people end up taking lots of tablets at different times*
- *When someone is taking lots of medicines it can be difficult to know what each one is for*
- *There are medicines which don't mix with other medicines or some foods*
- *Some people get side effects from one or more of their medicines*
- *Some people have questions or worries and don't know who to talk to*

Raise these or any other concerns at a medicines use review, when you meet to focus on your medicines.



Reporting a side effect or reaction to a medicine

If you think a medicine has caused an unwanted side effect (an adverse drug reaction), you can report the problem to the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) on a Yellow Card. The MHRA is the medicines safety watchdog and is part of the Department of Health.

Medicines are designed to prevent or treat illnesses, or relieve symptoms. Any effective medicine can cause side effects. Side effects may not be discovered until many people have used the medicine over a period of time. Side effects can occasionally appear when a person has stopped taking a medicine. For these reasons, the safety of medicines is monitored.

Reports of suspected side effects are collected through the Yellow Card Scheme on all types of medicines, including prescription medicines, medicines you can buy without a prescription, and herbal and other complementary remedies.

Even if you are not sure whether a medicine, or combination of medicines has caused a side effect, please complete a Yellow Card.

- **Yellow Card forms are available from pharmacies and other outlets across the NHS. Forms are also available directly from the Yellow Card hotline on freephone 0808 100 3352, or**
- **Yellow Card reports can be completed on the web at www.yellowcard.gov.uk.**

Yellowcard[®]

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What will happen in the meeting?

- **You will confirm the medicines you are taking.** The pharmacist will probably start by going through all the medicines you take (including medicines you have bought and herbal medicines), finding out how you take your medicines, and if you have enough information about them.
- **The pharmacist will check how well you are getting on with your medicines,** for example, can you swallow your medicines easily, or are you using your inhaler properly so that you get the most benefit from it.
- **Together, you will discuss how you think your medicines are working.** Not all your medicines may be necessary, or the dose might need to be adjusted by your doctor. A different medicine might make things easier.
- **Together, you will talk through any questions or concerns. If you have any side effects,** the pharmacist may be able to suggest something that will help or another medicine which might not cause the same problems.

You can feel free to ask any question about your medicines. There's a list of suggested questions to help you on page 14 of this booklet.

What happens afterwards?

- Everything may be okay with your medicines and nothing else will need to happen.
- **You will be given an Action Plan** which will include a note of any changes you have agreed in the way you take your medicines. This will be filled in by the pharmacist who did the review with you.
- **A copy of the Action Plan will go to your doctor** and be kept with your medical notes.
- **The pharmacist may recommend a change to your prescription.** You will have a note of this in the Action Plan. Both you and the person who prescribes your medicines (usually your doctor) will need to agree on any changes to your prescription, so you may be asked to make an appointment with them to discuss these. No changes will be made against your will.



“The Action Plan was a great help. Having it with me made me feel much more comfortable when I went back to talk to my doctor.”

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Questions you could ask

These are just suggestions. We've left some space for you to write your own questions on the back page. Or you may want to write on a separate sheet, which you can use for writing down the answers as well.

- What does this medicine do?
- Why is it important that I take this medicine?
- Are there any other treatment options?
- When and how should I take it?
- How long should I take it for?
- What other medicines, drinks, foods or activities should I be aware of when I am taking this medicine?
- What should I do if I don't feel well while taking it?
- How do I know it's helping?
- How can I be sure it's safe for me to take it?

- What are the possible risks and side effects?
- What should I do if I get one of these effects?
- Could another medicine do a better job, with less risk?
- What if I stopped taking it, or took a lower dose?
- Will the medicine build up in my body?
- Do I really need to take all these medicines?
- Is there anything that can help to remind me to take my medicines?
- Can I have containers that are easier to open?
- Could you provide the patient information leaflet for my medicine(s) in larger print?
- Where can I go for more information?



"I just thought that the doctor decided when... now I feel more confident, and I can go and ask for a review myself."

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Your questions and concerns

We've left some space for you to write your own questions below.



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