



Health Matters

at Aspen Valley Hospital

Spring 2010



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Get the most from your medicine by following your doctor's instructions

"Remember to take your medicine" is more than a friendly reminder. Medication adherence — or taking your medicine precisely as prescribed by your doctor — is important for ensuring that you obtain the optimum benefit from your medication and minimize risks to your health and safety.

Why medication adherence matters

The same medication that is a miracle cure can cause adverse health effects if not taken properly. For instance, not taking medication exactly as prescribed may lead to greater complications and lower quality of life for those with illnesses such as hypertension or diabetes.



Jean Cornish, RN, prepares medications for a patient.

Stopping some medications suddenly can be hazardous as well. With corticosteroid medications and many antidepressants, you need to taper off the medication with gradually reduced dosages.

What should you do if you miss a dose? Unless your doctor recommends it, never double your next dose because it may put you in danger of an overdose. You should also never split pills without your doctor's permission. Many medications are prescribed in a time-release form, and splitting these pills may lead to too much or too little of the medication.

In addition, some medications interact with certain foods, beverages, alcohol, caffeine, and even tobacco in ways that can cause dangerous side effects. For instance, chemicals in grapefruit interfere with the enzymes in the digestive system that break down various medications, including certain cholesterol-lowering drugs. The result can be excessively high levels of these drugs in the blood and an increased risk of potentially serious side effects. When you are prescribed medication, be sure to ask about possible interactions.

Do your part to battle antibiotic-resistant bacteria

In addition to the adverse effects on your own health, poor medication adherence can make it more difficult to treat certain illnesses in our community, such as infections caused by antibiotic-resistant bacteria. If your doctor prescribes an antibiotic, you must take the full course of medication even if you feel better before you finish.

Stopping too soon can leave some bacteria still alive, most likely those with some resistance to the antibiotic. As these bacteria grow and spread, new strains of resistant bacteria develop, such as Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA), which can be life threatening.



Mary Carter, MT, checks a culture plate for abnormal bacteria.



What you should know about your medication

To ensure that you receive the maximum benefits from your prescribed medication, be sure to ask your doctor and pharmacist the following questions:

- What is the name of the medicine?
- Why are you prescribing it?
- Is it okay to substitute a generic medicine for the name brand?
- What is the correct dose of the medicine?
- How often should I take it?
- Are there foods, drinks, other medicines, or activities I should avoid while taking this medicine?
- Should the medicine be taken at a particular time, such as mealtime or bedtime?
- What are the possible side effects of the medicine? What should I do if they occur?
- How long do I need to take the medicine?
- What should I do if I miss a dose?
- What should I do if I accidentally take more than the recommended dose?
- Is there any written information I can take home with me? (Your pharmacist will usually provide information sheets that you can use as a reference.)

Medications can improve your health and even save your life, but these miracles of modern medicine can offer the best benefits only when taken properly.

Breakthrough medications save lives

Most people today owe their existence to the discovery of a new medication. In fact, medical experts estimate that, without the antibiotic penicillin, 75 percent of us would have never been born because our parents or grandparents would have died from infections before producing offspring.

Besides penicillin and other antibiotics, the 20th century saw the development of insulin therapy for diabetes and anti-viral vaccines that have virtually eliminated smallpox, polio, and most once-common childhood illnesses, such as measles and chicken pox. Medical science has continued to advance in this century with the development of medications that not only treat diseases, but also help reduce risks to our health and improve the quality of our lives. Some of the most important new medications available today are:

- **Statins:** These cholesterol-lowering medications have been shown to reduce heart attacks and strokes in people with coronary artery disease and those at risk. A new study shows statins may also reduce the risk of these events in people with normal cholesterol levels but high levels of C-reactive protein (CRP), an indicator of inflammation associated with heart disease. What's more, some research suggests that statins may help reduce the risk of colorectal and skin cancers.
- **Tamoxifen (Nolvadex®):** For patients with hormone-receptor positive breast cancer, tamoxifen reduces the risk of recurrence and development of new tumors, as well as slows or stops the growth of advanced cancers.
- **Sildenafil (Viagra® or Revatio®):** This medication for erectile dysfunction allows millions of affected men to have the close physical relationships that are fundamental to a good quality of life.

and improve life's quality

- **Disease modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs):** Though rheumatoid arthritis has no cure, new DMARD drugs are greatly improving outcomes for patients by minimizing joint damage from the disease to enhance patients' ability to function normally with less pain.



Ericka Richards, PharmD, prepares a Remicade infusion. Remicade is a drug used for treating moderate to severe rheumatoid arthritis.

- **Protease inhibitors and non-nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors (NNRTIs):** Over 15 years ago, testing positive for HIV was almost considered a death sentence. Today, new medications that reduce the effects of the virus help delay or prevent illness, thus allowing those infected with HIV to manage their disease and enjoy a normal life — just as people manage other chronic conditions such as diabetes.

Medical science continues to progress with research into promising new drugs for breast cancer, leukemia, childhood cancers, and colorectal cancer, as well as medications to treat women with low libido, among other discoveries that may be the next medical breakthroughs.



Mike Goralka, MD, is a hospitalist at AVH and is board certified in internal medicine and pediatrics.

Meet the Medicine Department

The Medicine Department at Aspen Valley Hospital is comprised of 13 internists and family medicine physicians. Both types of specialists assess and treat a wide range of conditions, but also consult with other specialists as needed. They are experts in prevention, treating most acute illnesses, and helping people effectively manage chronic medical problems.

Family medicine physicians are trained to take care of most healthcare needs, regardless of age or gender, while internists provide comprehensive care for adults only. Both specialties require four years of medical school and four years of internship and residency training.

Family Medicine

Bruce Bowen, MD
Michael Check, MD
Anne Goyette, MD
Glenn Kotz, MD
Kelly Locke, MD
Dewayne Niebur, MD
Kim Scheuer, MD

Internal Medicine

Dave Borchers, MD
Mike Goralka, MD
Ann Mass, MD
Barry Mink, MD
Carl Schiller, MD
Susan Zimet, MD

Pick the right pill for your pain

If you wake up with a stiff, sore neck, you will probably head for the medicine cabinet for relief. But choosing from the array of over-the-counter (OTC) pain relievers — aspirin, ibuprofen, naproxen, and acetaminophen — can be an even bigger pain in the neck.

To make the right decision, it's important to understand the benefits and risks of these medications, considering your individual circumstances and any pre-existing conditions.

Aspirin

Brand names: Bayer®, St. Joseph®

Pros: Aspirin is a very inexpensive, effective pain reliever and anti-inflammatory drug that also helps protect against heart attacks and stroke.

Cons: Aspirin can irritate the stomach. Those with stomach ulcers or a history of internal bleeding should not take it. Large doses may also cause ringing in the ears. Finally, anyone under age 18 should not take aspirin due to the risk of Reye's Syndrome, a rare but serious illness.

Ibuprofen

Brand names: Advil®, Motrin®

Pros: Ibuprofen is a safe, inexpensive, and effective anti-inflammatory OTC drug. Dosing every six hours may help reduce stomach irritation.

Cons: Ibuprofen provides no cardiovascular protection, can irritate the stomach, and, with prolonged use, may cause kidney problems and increase the risk of heart attack or stroke.

Naproxen Sodium

Brand names: Aleve®, Naprosyn®

Pros: Naproxen is one of the most effective anti-inflammatory drugs. It's usually safe and needs to be taken only every eight to 12 hours.

Cons: Naproxen can be very irritating to the stomach and offers no cardiovascular protection. Prolonged use may cause kidney problems and may negate the protective effect of aspirin in preventing heart attack or stroke.

Acetaminophen

Brand name: Tylenol®

Pros: Acetaminophen has no adverse effects on the stomach or gastrointestinal tract. It's the safest choice for those taking daily aspirin therapy, people with stomach ulcers, pregnant women, and children.

Cons: When taken regularly or in high doses, it can cause liver injury or failure especially for those who regularly consume more than two alcoholic drinks a day.

Acetaminophen is often found in cold medications and narcotic drugs, so read ingredient labels and consult a doctor before taking acetaminophen with these medications.

Calendar of Events

Hospital District Election

Mail-In Ballot Deadline

Tuesday, May 4

Five-Year Continuation of Mill Levy

"Girl Talk"

Thursday, May 6 • 5:30 – 7 p.m.

for mothers and daughters ages 10 – 12

Charlene Guggenheim, MD, Pediatrician

Aspen Valley Hospital

Blood Drive

Tuesday, May 18 • 11 a.m. – 3 p.m.

Aspen Valley Hospital

Community Health Fair

Friday, June 4 • 8:30 – 11:30 a.m.

Blood tests only at After-Hours Medical Care in Basalt

Saturday, June 5 • 8:30 – 11:30 a.m.

Blood tests only at AVH

Sunday, June 6 • 8:30 – 11:30 a.m.

Blood tests and all screening stations at AVH

Call 544.1296 for more information

This publication in no way seeks to diagnose or treat illness or serve as a substitute for professional medical care. Please see your physician if you have a health problem.

Hospital district elections

As a special district, Aspen Valley Hospital (AVH) has a publicly elected Board of Directors. Terms are four years in length, and three of the seats — those currently filled by John Sarpa, Lee Schumacher, and Chuck Frias — are up for election in May 2010. Because there were no other candidates, the incumbents will automatically retain their seats on the Board for another four years.

Since 1995, AVH has gone to the voters every five years for approval of a 1.5 mill levy. The levy was last approved in 2005, and it currently generates \$3.5 million in revenues each year.

In May 2010, voters of the district (Pitkin County excluding Redstone) will be asked to continue the levy for another five years, also at 1.5 mills, but with a commitment that the revenues will be maintained at \$3.5 million. The current levy is .97 mills, as the hospital board lowered the levy for the past three years in response to rising property values. If approved and property values decrease, the AVH board would be able to increase the levy up to 1.5 mills in order to maintain the \$3.5 million in revenues.

The election in May is a mail ballot only. Registered voters of the district will receive their ballot in mid-April, and it must be returned by 7 p.m. on May 4. Questions can be referred to the election official at **544.1261**.

