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7 Need-to-Know Health Tips Straight From Pharmacists

Pharmacists know *way* more than you think.



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By Lisa Mulcahy
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You know who you should talk to more? The person at the drugstore doling out your meds.



1 We can protect your privacy.

"Recently, a doctor called to tell us that a patient had been diagnosed with a **serious sexually transmitted disease** and that both he and his fiancée would be by to pick up their medication later that day. I wanted to be as discreet as possible for them, so I wrote down some instructions, tucked them into the

prescription bag, sealed it, and kept it at my workstation until they arrived. When they did, the young woman's father was with them, and I could tell he didn't know about their diagnosis. I was glad that I had been extra-careful — but every patient deserves that kind of discretion, so don't be afraid to demand it. There are private consult areas for a reason, and you can always give us a call, too. You can even ask us to handle your meds a certain way, as I did for this couple. And if you don't feel your rights are being respected? Find another pharmacist — one who will put your privacy first!" —*Norman Tomaka*

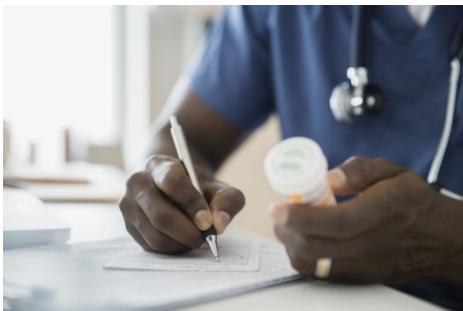
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2 Don't let drug ads scare you.

"A friend of my mom's reached out to me about a drug she was prescribed for osteoporosis. 'I saw a commercial for it, and there was such a long list of side effects that I'm scared to take it,' she said. I explained that those disclaimers are usually based on studies in which a very, very low percentage of patients suffered any adverse side effects at all. But more important, her doctor likely worked with all of the relevant information about her health to decide that the benefits of taking this drug outweighed any small risk, so I told her she should absolutely fill the prescription. The lesson: Always ask your doctor why she believes a **drug is safe for you**, and don't be afraid to talk to your pharmacist, too — we're a much more reliable resource than the Web." —*Susan A. Cantrell, registered pharmacist and chief executive officer of the Academy of Managed Care Pharmacy in Alexandria, VA*

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3 You might need to fire someone.

"I once knew a doctor who was so annoyed by the frequency of a pharmacy's phone calls that he didn't return them. One day a friend of mine who worked at the pharmacy tried to call; this doctor had prescribed a man who was already on a blood thinner a drug for chronic pain, and my friend **was worried about potential interactions**. As usual, the doctor didn't call back. The pharmacist did some research and found that taking the two drugs together can actually be deadly. Fortunately, the patient never started taking the medicine, and the doctor was apologetic when he found out what had happened. But the reality is this man could have been hurt or worse, all because of a physician's annoyance, and that's unacceptable. Remember this: Your pharmacist and doctor need to communicate effectively, for the good of your health. If you ever spot trouble between them, consider replacing one or both." —*Norman Tomaka, a clinical consultant pharmacist in Melbourne, FL, and spokesperson for the American Pharmacists Association*

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4 Trust me, we've heard them all.

"One time a family member came to me, and I could tell she was nervous to talk about whatever was bothering her. I told her to **speak freely and not to feel embarrassed**. Turns out she had vaginitis, and she wanted to know if I could recommend a lubricant that wouldn't worsen her symptoms. I asked a few questions and then walked her through everything, from the types of lubricant that would work best to how to properly use it. She was relieved, and she later told me that my advice had worked out well for her. I was so happy she came to me! I know it can be intimidating to be that personal, especially when the pharmacist is a stranger, but believe me, there's nothing we haven't heard before. Seek the information you want and need — never let embarrassment drive you to self-treat incorrectly or avoid getting the help you need." —*Mary M. Bridgeman, doctor of pharmacy and clinical associate professor at the Ernest Mario School of Pharmacy at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, NJ*

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5 Don't cry over spilled pills.

"I can't tell you how many times patients have come to me and said, 'I dropped my pills down the sink. What do I do?' For most drugs, there's a grace period in which we can fill the prescription early, so if you lose your pills within a week of the refill date, you likely won't have a problem. Anything past that and we'll have to get your doctor's permission. But if it's a controlled medication — one that's considered habit-forming, like Vicodin or Xanax — there's nothing we can do. So if you lose those kinds of pills, head straight to your doctor's office. Know this, too: If you need a lifesaving medication and it's a weekend or you're away from home, we'll do our best to give you a supplemental dose. I once helped a man who ended up staying with relatives longer than planned. He ran out of meds, so I contacted his pharmacy and got approval to give him enough to last until he got home. We'd never let you be in danger!" —*Sophia Demonte, registered pharmacist and pharmacy manager for the Costco Wholesale Corporation in Nesconset, NY*

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6 We can save you a trip to the doctor.

"Here's something I tell friends that I'd bet you'd never guess: Most pharmacies offer much more than just the **flu shot**. You can receive a vaccination for almost any illness at a lot of pharmacies, and sometimes without an appointment. What they're allowed to carry varies by state, so be sure to call ahead, but it's not uncommon to find vaccines for HPV, meningitis, hepatitis A and B, and lots more at a pharmacy. Just this weekend, one of our pharmacists gave a woman a tetanus shot because she scratched her foot on a rusty nail in her garden — no

waiting in the emergency room required!" —*Douglas S. Burgoyne, doctor of pharmacy and president of VRx/ Veridicus Health in Salt Lake City*

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7 OTC drugs can be dangerous, too.

"People tend to think that pain relievers like acetaminophen and ibuprofen are harmless, but you have to be very careful about mixing them with prescription drugs. I once had a friend who wanted to take an **over-the-counter drug**, like acetaminophen, in addition to the Percocet he was prescribed after having a tooth pulled. I told him to avoid acetaminophen but that another OTC might be okay and to check with his doctor. Sometimes he or she will tell you to rotate between two pain relievers, like acetaminophen and ibuprofen, to avoid any life-threatening interactions. You might alternate from one to the other every three hours, for example, but again, you should never make that decision on your own. Only your doctor or pharmacist can know if it's safe for you specifically." —*Evelyn R. Hermes-DeSantis, doctor of pharmacy and clinical professor of pharmacy practice and administration at the Ernest Mario School of Pharmacy at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, NJ*

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