

Medicines in Scotland: What's the right treatment for me? Information for patients and the public

This summary contains the main messages from a medicines booklet which was published in March 2017.

Both the booklet and summary can be downloaded from Healthcare Improvement Scotland's website -

www.healthcareimprovementscotland.org/medicinesbooklet.aspx.

The booklet and summary may help you to think about:

- your choices
- the best treatment for you, including whether you should start a medicine in the first place, and
- what questions to ask your healthcare professional about your medicines.

I have an appointment with a healthcare professional to discuss a problem. Is a medicine the best treatment option for me?

The healthcare professional will listen to what you say about your problem, and may examine you or do some tests, before deciding what treatment, if any, is needed. If treatment with a medicine isn't needed they may:

- reassure you that there is nothing to worry about
- advise you on lifestyle choices, for example healthy diet, less alcohol and more exercise
- suggest other types of treatment, for example physiotherapy, or
- advise you to keep a check on your symptoms and make another appointment if they don't get better.

If I need a medicine, how does the healthcare professional decide which medicine to prescribe?

If you need a medicine, the healthcare professional will speak to you about your options. Your healthcare professional will listen to what is important to you and think about the benefits and risks of the medicines and what they mean for you.

To get the best from your consultation with your healthcare professional and get the right information to make decisions about your health, you might want to ask some questions such as:

- Why do I need the medicine?
- Are there other treatment options and how will they help me?
- What are the benefits of each treatment option and how many people do they normally work for?
- What are the side effects of each treatment option and how likely are they to happen to me?
- Will the benefits or side effects reduce with time?
- How will I know if the medicine is working?
- How long will it take before the medicine starts to work?
- Do I need any check-ups for my medicine or my medical condition?
- What will happen if I decide not to start the medicine?

How can a medicine benefit me?

Benefit is the way a medicine can help you.

Examples of likely benefits of medicines include:

- treatment of a long term condition (a medical condition which lasts more than one year), for example asthma, epilepsy, diabetes
- relief of symptoms, for example constipation
- being pain free or having less pain, and
- being more mobile or being able to do more physical activity.

Not everyone gets better with medicine. Sometimes you may need to try different medicines to find the right one for you.

What risks are there with taking medicines?

Risk is the chance of harm from a medicine. All medicines can cause harm. Some medicines cause more harm than others. Examples of possible risks of medicines include:

- getting side effects, and
- a new medicine reacting with other medicines, alcohol or some foods.

You may also come to harm if you do not take your medicine as prescribed.

What do a medicine's benefits and risks mean for me?

You will have your own views about medicines and how taking a medicine fits in with your daily life. You may be unsure about the benefits and risks of taking a medicine.

People may have different opinions and preferences about what is important to them when taking a medicine (the benefits) and about the side effects they are willing to accept from a medicine (the risks).

You can talk to a healthcare professional about whether a medicine is right for you. You should tell them about the things that matter to you (for example how your symptoms affect your quality of life or worries about getting side effects from medicine).

I have been given a medicine and I'm not sure how to take it. How can I find out how to take the medicine properly?

You can ask a healthcare professional if you have any questions about your medicine. They will advise you how to use the medicine safely. They will tell you:

- what the medicine is called and what it is used for
- how you should take it
- possible side effects, and
- whether you can stop any of the other medicines you are taking.

You should also get a leaflet with your medicine which will give you more information about the medicine. It is important that you follow the advice you've been given on how to take your medicine so you take it safely and get the most benefit from it. A community pharmacist can give you information on medicines you have been prescribed or would like to buy.

I don't think my medicine is working or I think I am experiencing side effects from my medicine. What should I do?

If you don't think your medicine is working properly or if you experience side effects and are worried about them, you should speak to your healthcare professional.

I have medicines I no longer need. What should I do with them?

You can take medicines you no longer need to a community pharmacy. They will destroy them safely for you. You should not flush medicines down the toilet or put them in a household bin.

If you have a repeat prescription, only order the medicine you need and tell your healthcare professional if you no longer take any of the medicines.