

How do I buy medicines in Australia?

There are 2 ways to buy medicines in Australia:

- From your doctor, for prescription medicines.
- From a pharmacy, for over-the-counter medicines.

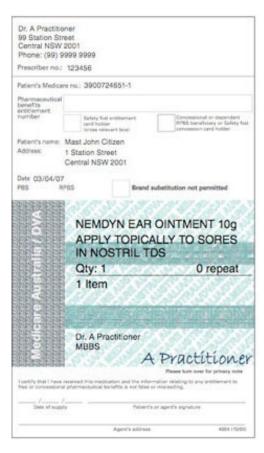
Prescription medicines

You can only get some medicines with a piece of paper from your doctor, known as a "prescription" or "script". This prescription tells the pharmacy what medicine you need and how you should use it.

To get your medicine, take the prescription to any pharmacy. Take your Medicare Card or Health Care Card with you because these can often get you a discount. If you are an asylum seeker, you may need to go to a specific pharmacy to get your medicine.

If you need to take the medicine for a long time, the doctor might give you a "repeat" of a prescription. This means that you can buy the medicine again using the same prescription without visiting your doctor again.

Prescription medicines are ONLY for the person whose name is on the prescription. It can be dangerous for other people to use them.



An example of a prescription in Australia

It is important to keep taking prescription medicines until your doctor or pharmacist tells you to stop, even if you are feeling better.

It is important to tell every doctor or nurse you see what medicines you are taking. Also tell them if there is a medicine that makes you sick. If you don't tell all doctors this information, they might give you new medicine which will not work properly with the medicine you are already taking.

If you take vitamins, supplements, herbal or traditional medicines, tell you your doctor, nurse or pharmacist. Sometimes these can make the medicines your doctor gives you not work properly or cause problems for your health.

Over-the-counter medicines

You can buy medicines without a prescription. These are called "over the counter" medicines. You can buy these medicines at pharmacies and other shops like supermarkets.

Examples of over-the-counter medicines:

- Cough, cold and flu medicines
- Pain medicines like aspirin, acetaminophen, and ibuprofen
- Medicines for sore throat, headache, earache, and body aches
- Eye drops
- Medicines for diarrhoea and constipation

How do I take medicines correctly?

All medicines have a label.

The label tells you how to use the medicine safely, including:

- > How much to use
- > When to use it
- How many times a day you should use it
- How many days you should use it for



It is very important to take medicines as it says on the label.

Take the medicine for as long as suggested.

Do not take more or less medicine than what is on the label or your pharmacist has told you.

Medicines can help you get better when you are sick, but if you do not take them correctly, they can hurt you.

Do not give any of your medicine to other people and don't take another person's medicine.

A medicine that is good for someone else might not work for the illness you have and may make it worse.

Antibiotics are very strong medicines. You should only taken them if your doctor tells you to. They can have serious side effects if you don't take them properly.

Some medicines can cause side effects. Side effects may be mild, like an upset stomach, or they can be more serious, like damage to your liver.

If you notice that something is wrong with you, speak to your doctor or pharmacist. Ask for an interpreter if you need one. Interpreters are free.



An example of antibiotics

What is a generic medicine?

Sometimes you can choose between a "generic" medicine and a brand name medicine.

Generic and brand name medicines work the same way. Generic medicine usually costs less.

If there is a generic option for the medicine you need, your pharmacist may ask you if you would like the 'generic' medicine instead of the brand name medicine.

If the pharmacist doesn't ask you, you can ask if they have a generic brand (a less expensive brand) of the medicine you need.





Brand

Generic

Ask questions to make sure you understand your medicines

Ask your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist questions to be sure you understand how to use your medicine.

To use medicines safely, you need to know:

- > What the medicine is
- > Why you are using the medicine
- How and when to use the medicine
- If there are any medicines you shouldn't use with this one

If you forget how to use your medicine or if you don't understand the information on the label, you can ask a pharmacist for help.

How do I store my medicines correctly?

Medicines that are stored correctly last longer and work better.

- > Put your medicines in a safe place, away from children and pets.
- > Store your medicines in a cool, dry place. Places that are damp and warm, like the kitchen or bathroom can damage your medicines.

- > Keep medicines in their original containers, as they have the instructions on the label.
- Some medications need refrigeration.
 This is normally written on the label.
- Throw away expired medicines and medicines you no longer use.

How do medicines work?

- Some medicines work quickly and others take time. For example, some pain killers (called analgesics) may take a few minutes to treat the pain, but antibiotic tablets may take more than 24 hours before you notice an infection improving, antidepressants can typically take two weeks before you notice an improvement in mood.
- If you are worried your medicines are not working or that your health is getting worse, you should see your doctor immediately.
- > Some medicines work best on an empty stomach or can irritate the stomach so these are best taken with food.

