



What Is Medicine?

Medicine is something that is taken into or placed on the body that may:

1. **Cure** a disease or condition. For example, antibiotics are used to cure an infection.
2. **Treat** a medical condition. For example, antidepressants are used to treat depression.
3. **Relieve symptoms** of an illness. For example, pain relievers are used to reduce pain.
4. **Prevent** diseases. For example, a flu shot helps to prevent the flu.

Prescription vs. Over-The-Counter (OTC) Medicines

Prescription medicines are medicines that can be sold only with a written order by a doctor. OTC medicines are medicines that are safe enough for you to take **WITHOUT** a written order by a doctor.

You may also use medicines referred to as alternative medicines. These are called **natural products**. These include vitamins, minerals, herbals and dietary supplements. Even though these are natural, they may still hurt you. It is important for you to know that these may cause problems with your other medicines.

All of the following are considered medicines:

- Prescription medicines
- OTC medicines, like pain relievers and cold medicine
- Natural products, like vitamins and herbals
- Ointments or creams
- Bottles of drops (ear and/or eye drops)
- Patches and sprays
- Inhalers or puffers
- Injections

Take all medicines with you to your next doctor's appointment, including prescribed medicines from your doctor, OTCs, herbals, vitamins, drops, patches, inhalers or creams. This will help prevent adverse drug effects and help your doctor understand how your medicines affect your illness.