

What Patients Actually Don't Understand About Their Prescriptions

Hey there,

Did I catch you staring at the paper from your doctor, narrowing your eyes at those scribbles, guessing if it's a secret code or an actual medicine?

We have all been there.

As a clinician, I have seen it all. Patients grab their meds, take them as told or sometimes as guessed, and hope for the best. But the truth is, there is so much more to it than just swallowing pills.

So today, let's reveal the secrets that the prescription holds. Let me walk you through it, starting with this:

A prescription is not a shopping list but a customised plan for you.

Your doctor did not write it randomly. It's based on your medical history, age, weight, height, and allergies, and overall condition. And yet, a lot gets lost in translation.

"AFTER FOOD" AND "BEFORE FOOD" INSTRUCTIONS ARE NOT CASUAL ADVICE

These instructions aren't suggestions. They are science-backed rules.

Many people assume they are optional, but they are not. **They are based on how a drug behaves in your body.**

Some medicines irritate the stomach lining and need food to protect it. While the other absorbs better on an empty stomach.

When these instructions are ignored, the medicine may:

- Not work as intended
- Cause avoidable side effects

They may seem like small details, but clinically, they make a real difference.

DOSAGES: IT'S NOT WHAT YOU THINK IT IS

One of the most commonly misunderstood parts of a prescription is the dosing frequency.

It sounds simple, but here's how it is often interpreted:

- "Take twice daily, " = morning and night at whatever time convenient, or both doses taken close together

- “Three times a day” = morning, night, and one random dose whenever remembered, either at lunch or evening.

But in reality:

“Take twice daily “ = every 12 hours, and “ Three times a day” = every 8 hours.

This is done to maintain steady drug levels in the body, especially for medicines like antibiotics.

This is important because incorrect spacing can lead to:

- Fluctuating drug levels
- Reduced effectiveness
- Increased side-effects

Poor timing can directly affect treatment outcomes.

And while standard dosing works for adults, it gets tricky for geriatric patients and kids, where the kidneys and liver are the real plot twist with too many spells, leading to overdose risk.

SIDE -EFFECTS: EXPECTED VS DANGEROUS

Another major gap? Patients don't know what to expect.

Without proper information, people end up guessing. They either:

- panic at mild, expected side effects
- Or ignore the serious ones.

This can lead to:

- Anxiety and mistrust in treatment
- Unnecessary discontinuation
- Delayed reporting of serious reactions

Clear communication and information about side effects can change the confidence and safety of patients.

INTERACTIONS: THE HIDDEN RISK

We all have these common assumptions:

- “It's a supplement, so it's safe”
- “Herbal medications don't interact”
- “Taking medicines with milk is healthy”
- “ I missed a dose, I'll just take it with the next one, it's not a big deal”

But actually, patients rarely can connect the dots between different medicines they are taking.

Drug- Drug interaction, drug-food interactions exist; they occur.

Improper counselling is risky as these interactions can:

- Reduce effectiveness
- Increase toxicity
- Cause unexpected side effects

THE “I FEEL BETTER, SO I STOPPED” PROBLEM

This is something we hear all the time.

Patients often stop treatment when symptoms start to improve, and they feel normal again. But symptom relief does not mean disease resolution.

Stopping early can lead to:

- Relapse
- Incomplete treatment
- Resistance in case of antibiotics

THE MISSING PIECE “WHY “BEHIND THE MEDICINE

Many patients know *what* they are taking but don't know *why*.

When asked about it, we hear:

- “The doctor gave it, so it must be important”
- “This is to improve my current health”
- “Maybe for infection?”
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Without understanding the use of each medicine, it becomes easy to:

- Skip doses
- Stop early
- Misuse medicines later

Knowing the “why” changes everything.

WHY THIS GAP EXISTS

To be fair, this isn't entirely the patient's fault.

Healthcare today is demanding. Starting with a short consultation, information overload leading to limited patient counselling.

Patients are left to absorb all of this like a sponge in just a few minutes. And honestly, most prescriptions are not written with patient understanding in mind.

EMPOWER YOURSELF: QUESTIONS TO ASK EVERY TIME

At your next appointment with your doctor, turn the tables. Don't hesitate to ask them these:

- What are the exact timings?
- Should I take it before or after food?
- What symptoms to look out for?
- How long should I continue this for?
- What is this medicine for?

A few questions can prevent a lot of confusion later.

THE BIG PICTURE: YOU ARE IN CHARGE OF YOUR HEALTH

Prescriptions are not gibberish; they are more than a document. They are powerful tool that directly impacts your health.

Misunderstand them, and you are playing russian roulette.

Medication literacy is not a luxury; it is a necessity.

So next time a prescription is handed to you, don't just follow it- understand it.

Reclaim your control, get it right. Decode it like a pro.

And if you are ever unsure, ask your pharmacist. We are here to help you get it right, here for the win.

So stay Healthy, Stay Curious.