



A program of Choices Healthcare

Medication Basics

A list of the patient's medicines and side effects is kept in the home. This list is reviewed frequently and revised as needed to maintain accuracy. Your Hospice nurse will provide training on how to measure and administer medicine.

When a patient is receiving hospice care they might be taking several medications, ones that help prevent nausea or vomiting, help reduce pain or anxiety, or relieve constipation or diarrhea. They may also be taking medications for other health conditions like diabetes, heart failure, or high blood pressure. It can be a lot to organize and keep track of.

Some ideas that might help you organize and track medications each day include:

- You may choose to use a simple paper form to track scheduled medications.
- Keep track of the scheduled medications on the front
- And the "as needed" medications on the back.
- Use a pill organizer with a separate section for each day of the week and times of the day. Fill this up ahead of time with scheduled medications for each week.
- If you prefer an electronic version, there are free smartphone apps that track medication and will give you reminders when a dose is due.
- If the patient has trouble remembering to take their medication, and you can't be there to remind them, you may choose to purchase a pill dispenser that will remind them to take their medications and dispense the medications at the right times.

Medication safety tips:

- Keep discontinued medications in a separate area, away from the medications that are currently in use; or dispose of them [show how, using dirt, kitty litter, or coffee grounds]
- Keep short-acting and long-acting forms of the same medication in different locations, to decrease the risk of giving the wrong medication.

When giving medication by mouth:

- Wash your hands.
- Check the medication bottle and the medication list to make sure you are giving the right medication, the right amount, and at the right time. Read any special instructions like "give medication with food or give before breakfast on an empty stomach."
- Help the patient to sit up in a comfortable position. If they are in bed, raise the head of the bed and help them to a sitting position. Offer a glass of water or juice to moisten the mouth and make swallowing easier. After the patient has the medication in their mouth, give them sips of water to help wash the medication down. Make sure they have swallowed the medication.
- Finish by washing your hands and recording the medication given in your record.

- Most medications are ordered to be given by mouth, however, remember that as the patient becomes weaker, they may be less able to swallow medications safely. If this should occur, consult with your Hospice nurse or call the Hospice 24-hour number. Do not crush or break any medication without speaking to a Hospice nurse first.

When giving medication by the rectal route:

A suppository is a medication that has been molded into a solid shape that can be administered in the rectum. Suppositories are often used to relieve constipation, but can also be used to relieve pain, nausea, vomiting, and fever, or to prevent seizures. Medication given this way is absorbed into the bloodstream through the colon.

- Begin by washing your hands.
- Check the medication list to make sure you are giving the right medication, the right amount, and at the right time.
- The supplies you will need include medical gloves, lubricant like KY jelly® and the suppository.
- Remove the suppository from the foil or plastic packet and place it on a folded paper towel.
- Apply lubricant to the pointed end of the suppository and carry it to the bedside.
- Put on your medical gloves.
- Ask or help the patient to lie on their left side with their knees pulled up toward their chest if possible.
- Ask the patient to take a few slow, deep breaths to try to relax. Spread the buttocks and slide the suppository, pointed end first, into the rectum until it is completely inside. If you feel resistance or cannot insert the suppository, call the hospice 24-hour number and speak to a nurse.
- The suppository may give the patient the urge to have a bowel movement. Unless the suppository was intended for this purpose, encourage them to try to hold it for at least 15 minutes to allow the medication time to absorb.
- Remove your gloves, wash your hands, and record when the medication was given in your medication record.

Some medications can be administered through a medicated patch. The medication is absorbed through the skin and into the bloodstream. **When applying a medicated patch:**

- Check the medication list to make sure you are giving the right medication, the right amount, and at the right time.
- Wash your hands and put on medical gloves. You want to prevent the medication from getting on your skin and being absorbed into your body.
- Check to make sure all previous patches of the same medication have been removed. Fold used patches in half, sticky side to sticky side. There is still some medication on the old patches when they are removed. Refer to the medication disposal guidelines for instructions on safe disposal to avoid harm to others.
- Select a new clean dry area, typically above the waist, like the upper chest, back, or arms. Choose a spot with limited movement and away from skin folds. Avoid skin that has a cut or a wound, or skin that is scarred or has a tattoo. Prepare the area by cleaning it with warm water and soap that does not contain lotion, drying it completely, and clipping hair if necessary. Do not shave the area.

- Carefully open the packaging by cutting on the marked line with scissors and remove the patch. If the patch is accidentally damaged, discard the patch per medication guidelines and select a new patch.
- Take the patch out of the packaging. Before you remove the liner from the sticky side, put the date and time on the top side. Remove the protective liner on the patch as directed by the patch instructions. Be careful not to touch the sticky side of the patch.
- Press the sticky side against the patient's skin. If the patch's protective liner contains two parts, first peel off one part of the liner. Apply the exposed sticky part of the patch to the skin and press down. Next, peel back the second part of the liner and press the entire patch down.
- After the patch has been applied to the patient's skin, press down on the patch for 30 seconds to keep it in place.
- When applying medication to the skin, anything that increases heat to the area speeds absorption: a heating pad over the patch, sitting in bright sunlight on the beach, and extra blankets should be avoided. If the patient develops a fever, call the hospice 24-hour number for advice.
- When you are finished, remove and discard your gloves, wash your hands, and record when the patch was applied in your medication record. It may be helpful to note the date and time for the next patch change on your calendar.

When giving medication under the tongue or in the pocket between the cheek and gum:

- When a patient is having difficulty swallowing, some medications for pain and/or anxiety may be given under the tongue or in the pocket between the cheek and gum.
- Begin by washing your hands.
- Be sure the inside of the mouth is clean and moist. If it is not, provide mouth care before giving the medication.
- If you have prefilled syringes, check the label and the medication list to make sure you are giving the right medication, the right amount, and at the right time.
- If you have received instructions on how to fill a syringe with the correct dose check the medication bottle and the medication list. Fill the syringe provided by the pharmacy or your nurse with the prescribed amount.
- Squirt the medication under the tongue or in the pocket between the cheek and gum.
- Allow time for the medicine to absorb. Do NOT swab or moisten the mouth for at least 30 minutes.
- Finish by washing your hands and recording the medication given in your record.

If you are drawing up concentrated liquid morphine or concentrated liquid oxycodone for the first time:

- Wash your hands.
- Check the medication list for the prescribed amount of medication and when it is to be given. Gather the medication and the syringe provided by the pharmacy or the hospice nurse.
- Remove the lid and place it on a paper towel.
- Insert the syringe into the bottle and draw up medication to about 0.1 mL. It's quite common to have air in the syringe. If this happens, hold the syringe upright, with the open end up and gently pull down on the plunger to add more air.
- Tap gently to collect the air bubbles at the top then slowly push the plunger up until the air has been expelled and the medication is right at the opening. You can now reinsert the syringe into

the bottle and draw up the prescribed amount. For example, if the dose is 5 milligrams, you would draw the medication up to the 0.25 mL line on the syringe.

- Squirt the medication under the tongue or in the pocket between the cheek and gum.
- Finish by washing your hands and recording the medication given in your record.
- Allow time for the medicine to absorb. Do NOT swab or moisten the mouth for at least 30 minutes.

If you are using the dropper provided with the concentrated liquid morphine or concentrated liquid oxycodone:

- Insert the medicine dropper and squeeze the rubber top to draw the medication into the dropper.
- Slowly drop the prescribed dose onto the bowl of a teaspoon. One drop is approximately equal to one milligram (mg). For example, if the dose is 5 milligrams you would give 5 drops.
- Use the spoon to place the medication under the tongue or in the pocket between the cheek and gum.
- Finish by washing your hands and recording the medication given in your record.
- Clean the spoon.
- Allow time for the medicine to absorb. Do NOT swab or moisten the mouth for at least 30 minutes.

If you are crushing medication to be given by mouth or under the tongue: *(First, ask your primary doctor or Hospice nurse before using this method, because some pills should not be crushed.)*

- Wash your hands. Try not to touch the pill with your bare hands; wear medical gloves, if available.
- Use clean, dry equipment, such as a pill crusher (preferred), a clean plastic sandwich bag a heavy cup a small cup/bowl, and a sturdy spoon.
- Crush the pill, then put ALL of it into a small bowl or cup.
- Draw 0.5 to 1 milliliter of water into your syringe. If it is difficult for the patient to swallow, use a smaller amount.
- Add the water from the syringe to the crushed pill in the bowl. Use just enough water to dissolve the medicine.
- Mix the crushed pill and water until the medication dissolves.
- Draw up ALL the dissolved mixture into the syringe.
- Have the person sit up or raise the head of your bed to at least a 30-degree angle.
- Drop by drop, place all the dissolved medication under the tongue or in the pocket between the cheek and gum.
- Wash your hands and record the medication given in the medication record.
- Allow time for the medicine to absorb. Do NOT swab or moisten the mouth for at least 30 minutes.
- Two medications frequently given to hospice patients are concentrated liquid morphine (for pain or shortness of breath) and lorazepam for anxiety. If they are due to be given at the same time, it is okay to crush the lorazepam put it in a small bowl, and use the liquid morphine dose to dissolve the lorazepam.
- You then draw up the mixture in a syringe and squirt it under the tongue or in the pocket between the cheek and gum.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to call the 24-hour number at (877) 506-0149.