

Healthy Habits

HEALTHY HABIT #7

Be well informed about medications

At no time in history have there been so many medications available and as Costco employees, we are fortunate to be able to have good drug coverage available through our health benefits and to have our prescriptions filled in the warehouse. But even the most effective medications can't do their jobs properly when they are not taken as prescribed.

Use your prescriptions properly

Guessing about a prescription is never a good idea; making an error when taking medication can result in harmful side effects or no effects at all. These simple guidelines can help you make sure your prescription is working at full potential:

- **Ask questions** – If you are unclear on any of the instructions or their meaning, clarify with your physician and/or pharmacist before starting your regimen.
- **Follow directions** – Once you understand how to take your medication, it is important to do so correctly and consistently. Some medications, like antibiotics, require you to finish your prescription even if the symptoms are waning. If you fail to do so, you might be at risk for the same infection to return. In the case of a missed dose, follow the instructions on how to catch up. And never take more than the recommended dosage of any medication, over-the-counter (OTC) or prescription.
- **Use original packaging** – Instructions are printed on your prescription or OTC container. In addition, never mix different drugs in the same container. Many medications can look very similar, and you don't want to risk taking a vitamin when you should be taking your antibiotic. Also, original containers are almost always childproof.
- **Follow expiration dates** – Most pills have a shelf life of one year, and liquid medications often expire sooner. Don't use medications after the expiration dates printed on their labels. It is also a good idea to discard any medications that your doctor has instructed you to stop taking.
- **Don't use the medicine cabinet!** – Ironically, the medicine chest in the bathroom is not the best place to keep any medication. The moisture in the air can make medicine less potent.

Save money with generics

Most generic drugs cost 20-60 percent less than their name-brand counterparts, and the FDA requires all generic brands to meet the same standards and regulations as name brands. Generics are less expensive, because generic manufacturers do not have to undergo the same investment costs as companies that develop new drugs. Competition among generics also helps to keep their prices low. More than half of all prescriptions written today are filled with generic drugs. If you have questions, contact your physician, pharmacist or Aetna. The FDA website, <http://www.fda.gov/cder/ogd/index.htm>, is also a good source for additional information.

Save with Costco's over-the-counter program

Costco provides benefits coverage for a limited number of OTC drugs, specifically certain allergy and heartburn/reflux medications that have been reclassified from prescription to OTC by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Treatment outcomes when using these OTC medications are often as effective as those experienced when using the prescription medications currently being prescribed for these conditions. In some cases, these OTC drugs contain the exact same active ingredient as the name-brand prescription.

Physicians are not in the habit of prescribing OTC medications for their patients, because employer health plans, like Costco's, traditionally have not offered coverage for them. Consequently, the more expensive prescription brand is prescribed since it costs the patient less money than if they had to pay full price for an OTC drug.

How much could you save? In the example, a one month's supply of the OTC products listed in bold print will cost you \$0; those not bolded will cost you only \$3. You will save as much as \$25 per prescription by switching your current prescription brand to one of these.

Switching over to an OTC is easy. Start by discussing these prescription options with your physician to determine if one of the OTC medications is right for you or your family member. If so, ask your physician to write you a new prescription for the OTC drug and then have it filled at a Costco pharmacy.

Which over-the-counter drugs are covered? How much will they cost?



Acid Blockers (alternatives to Nexium, Prevacid, Protonix and Aciphex):

		Your cost
Prilosec OTC	20 mg	\$0
Kirkland Signature Acid Reducer Ranitidine Tablets	75 mg	\$0
Kirkland Signature Acid Controller – 240 Famotidine Tablets	10 mg	\$0
Zantac 150 Maximum Strength Ranitidine Tablets	150 mg	\$3
Pepcid AC Maximum Strength – Famotidine Tablets	20 mg	\$3
Pepcid Complete Acid Reducer plus Antacid Famotidine 10 mg	10 mg Famotidine/800 mg Calcium Carbonate/ 165 mg Magnesium Hydroxide	\$3

Allergy treatments (alternatives to Allegra, Allegra-D, Zyrtec, Zyrtec-D, Clarinex and Clarinex-D):

		Your cost
Kirkland Signature AllerClear D24 DR	10 mg Loratadine/240 mg Pseudoephedrine Sulfate	\$0
Kirkland Signature AllerClear Non-Drowsy Loratadine	10 mg	\$0
Claritin Non-Drowsy 24hr	10 mg	\$3
Claritin-D24	10 mg Loratadine/240 mg Pseudoephedrine Sulfate	\$3
Claritin RediTabs 24hr Loratadine Orally Disintegrating Tablet	10 mg	\$3
Claritin-D 12hr	5 mg Loratadine/120 mg Pseudoephedrine Sulfate	\$3
Alavert Non-Drowsy Loratadine Orally Disintegrating Tablet	10 mg	\$3