

Help from Your Pharmacist

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If you are like most people, your pharmacist is the health care provider you see most often. I have patients who take *lots* of pills, sometimes 30 or more a day. That's a lot of trips to the drugstore, and a lot of interactions with the pharmacist.

I know that many of these interactions aren't wonderful ones, especially if they involve long waits in line or confusion about your prescription. But the fact is you can get lots of help from your pharmacist.

There are so many new diabetes medications - you may be taking two or more right now. There are also new ways to deliver insulin, the diabetes medication most people take, and new devices to monitor blood glucose levels. All these developments are really exciting, but sorting through the options and choosing the ones that are right for you can feel overwhelming.

More pharmacists are diabetes specialists. Your pharmacist can help make these decisions a little less daunting. Some pharmacists are becoming diabetes specialists, trained and skilled in helping people manage their diabetes more easily and effectively. Pharmacists are recognizing that people with diabetes need this help. Some pharmacists are even becoming Certified Diabetes Educators (CDE).

Naturally, the growing trend toward diabetes specialty pharmacy care is motivated in part by business considerations. Let's face it: diabetes is big business, and with the growing epidemic of type 2 diabetes, the business is getting bigger every day. You have probably seen signs of this yourself: ads for diabetes products appearing on television, or in a national magazine. It says something when you see an ad about a diabetes pill or a new blood glucose monitor right alongside one for toothpaste or breakfast cereal.

What a pharmacist can do for you. Some pharmacies, ranging from small local stores to large chains, have a special commitment to meeting the needs of people with diabetes. Pharmacists in these stores usually have more training in diabetes management, and some may even be CDE. These stores usually offer a wider range of diabetes products and more information concerning these products.

If you go to a pharmacy that specializes in diabetes care, it may offer a variety of services, including:

- ***A complete review of all the medications you take,*** including diabetes medication, other prescribed medication, and any other pills (herbal and over the counter medication) you may take. This review could identify *drug/drug interactions*, unwanted or even dangerous side effects of combining certain medications. This service can be especially helpful if you are taking medication prescribed by more than one doctor, since the doctors might not have compared notes. The pharmacist can also tell you if any medications you

are taking are likely to cause problems in the short run (like hypoglycemia) or in the long run (like causing kidney or liver problems). Your pharmacist might also be able to suggest less expensive medications that work as well as more expensive ones you are taking. You can discuss any of this information with your primary health care provider to verify it is valid for you.

- **A connection to other caregivers.** Many pharmacists maintain lists of other caregivers who may be especially helpful to people with diabetes, including eye specialists (ophthalmologists), foot specialists (podiatrists), diabetes educators, dietitians, and weight loss and smoking cessation specialists. If you need any of these services – and everyone with diabetes should have an eye exam each year – be sure to ask your pharmacist for suggestions.
- **Education.** Pharmacists are trained to help people manage their diabetes in ways that fit their lifestyles. A pharmacist can help you sort through your options and put together a plan for reaching your diabetes management goals as easily and effectively as possible. Pharmacists are generally up on the latest diabetes developments, from new medications to new monitors, so they can help you stay up to date too.
- **Information.** Pharmacists can also answer your questions: When is the best time to take your new medication? Is that medication causing the stomach upset you've been having? Are there less expensive pills that work as well?

Very few people get all these services from their pharmacist. The services are not available everywhere. But few people make use of the services that *are* available. Getting help from your pharmacist requires the same assertive approach it takes to get help from other members of your diabetes care team.

Getting the help you want from your pharmacist. If you have a choice, look for a pharmacy that bills itself as a diabetes specialty store. Then check out the services to be sure you agree with this description. Contact your local American Diabetes Association (ADA) office for the names of diabetes specialty pharmacies in your area.

Whether you have the option of going to a diabetes specialty pharmacist or not, you can always get more from whoever serves you. Just remember that your pharmacist is another member of your diabetes care team – potentially a very valuable member. And remember to ask questions. Ask questions about the specific services the pharmacy could offer you as a person with diabetes. And ask specific questions about your diabetes management. Your pharmacist can help you reach your diabetes goals.