

Rx Basics:

Choosing a Pharmacy



Once you receive a prescription from your health-care provider, you may purchase the medication from various sources. Factors that may affect where you fill your prescription include the pharmacy's location and hours of operation, the services it provides, cost of the medication and your insurance plan's drug coverage.

When choosing a pharmacy, you should consider the following factors:

- Does your health insurance plan limit where you can fill prescriptions?
- Does the pharmacy offer special services you may need, such as compounding or vaccinations?
- Does the pharmacy keep computerized patient records and check for drug interactions?
- Are the pharmacy's employees friendly and helpful?
- Are the pharmacists willing to take time to answer drug-related questions?

Local (Community) Pharmacies

The most common place for filling a prescription is a local pharmacy. Community pharmacies may be part of a drug or grocery store chain or be independently owned. If you belong to a health maintenance organization, you may be required to use an onsite HMO pharmacy or use local pharmacies designated by the HMO.

Mail-Order Pharmacies

Some individuals and insurance companies use mail-order pharmacies. Normally, a prescription is sent or phoned in to the mail-order pharmacy by the physician. It may take a week or more for mailed medication(s) to reach your home. Mail-order prescriptions may be subject to theft, temperature damage and other problems.

Short-term medications such as antibiotics and those requiring stable storage temperatures should be purchased only at a local pharmacy. Mail order is best used for maintenance medications for such chronic problems as hypertension, cholesterol, diabetes or asthma.

Online Pharmacies

Some individuals purchase long-term medications or general pharmacy supplies from internet pharmacies. The web site should clearly explain the steps for filling or transferring a prescription and clearly state all procedures and privacy policies. **Never use an internet pharmacy that does not require a doctor-issued prescription or that**



offers to issue one for you. Use only those internet pharmacies that display the VIPPS seal ([Verified Internet Pharmacy Practice Site](#)) granted by the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy. A VIPPS accredited pharmacy must comply with the licensing and inspection requirements of any state in which it dispenses medications. VIPPS-sanctioned pharmacies are committed to patient privacy, authentication and security of prescription orders, adherence to quality assurance and meaningful consultation with patients.

Avoiding Delays and Problems

To help the pharmacy fill your prescription as accurately and quickly as possible, make sure the following information is clearly printed on the prescription: patient's name, address and phone number, and health-care provider's name. A sloppy prescription may be illegible or incomplete. When phoning the pharmacy for a refill, make sure you have refills remaining on your prescription. If not, you will need to contact your doctor. Be sure to provide the prescription number, name of medication and name of the patient.

Normally, the busiest times in a pharmacy are at opening, lunchtime and immediately after work (4 p.m. to about 7:30 p.m.). If you drop off or pick up a prescription outside these hours, you'll wait a shorter time.

Filling all your prescriptions at one pharmacy enables an accurate record of what drugs you currently take or have taken. An accurate drug history helps your pharmacist prevent potentially harmful drug interactions, or interactions that may decrease the effectiveness of your medications. To keep an accurate record of all your prescription medications, over-the-counter drugs and supplements, use TPA's [Universal Medication Form](#).