



PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

How to Fill Your Pill Box

This information explains how to fill your pill box.

A pill box is a container used to organize your medication doses for a certain length of time. It's also called a pill container or pill case. Using a pill box is very helpful if you need to take a few different medications. It will help you avoid missing doses of your medications.

Pill boxes come in many different sizes (see Figures 1 and 2). They can hold your medication doses for up to 14 days and have up to 4 spaces per day. If you're not sure which one is best for you, ask your healthcare provider.



Figure 1. An example of a pillbox



Figure 2. An example of a pillbox

If more than one person in your household uses a pill box, it's helpful if they're different colors. This will help keep them from getting mixed up.

Most pill boxes aren't child-safe. If there are children in your home, keep your pill box in a place they can't reach.

Instructions for Filling Your Pill Box

- The instructions on your medication bottles and Home Medication List may be different. This can happen if your healthcare provider changes your medication dose or schedule more often than you refill your medications. **Always follow the instructions on your Home Medication List, not your medication bottles.** Your Home Medication List has the most up-to-date information about your medications.
- Only put the medications you take on a schedule in your pill

box. If you have medications you take only when you need them, such as medications for pain or nausea (feeling like you're going to throw up), keep them separate from your standing medications. For example, keep the bottles in a separate labeled bag.

- If you have arthritis, peripheral neuropathy, or trouble with your memory, it might be harder for you to fill your pill box. Ask your family member, friend, or visiting nurse for help if you need it. You can also ask your pharmacy to put your medications in non-childproof bottles so they're easier to open.

Get your supplies ready

1. Set up your supplies on a large, clean, flat surface. You'll need:
 - The medications you take on a schedule
 - Your Home Medication List
 - Your pill box
2. Clean your hands.
 - If you're washing your hands with soap and water, wet your hands, apply soap, rub them together well for 20 seconds, then rinse. Dry your hands with a disposable towel and use that same towel to turn off the faucet.
 - If you're using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, be sure to cover your hands with it, rubbing them together until

they're dry.

3. Line up your pill bottles in the order they're listed on your Home Medication List. If you have more than 1 pill bottle for a certain medication, place the bottles next to one another.

Fill your pill box

Start with the first medication on your Home Medication List. Finish putting all doses of that medication into your pill box before moving on to the next one.

For each medication:

1. Look at your Home Medication List to see what dose you need to take.
2. Look at the pill bottle(s) to see the medication strength.
3. Figure out the number of pills needed to make the right dose.
 - You may need to use more than 1 pill to make the right dose.
 - You may need to use different strength pills to make the right dose. For example, to make a 2.5 milligram (mg) dose, you may need to use 2 (1 mg) pills and 1 (0.5 mg) pill.
4. Look at your Home Medication List to see when you need to take the medication.
 - If your Home Medication List doesn't say which day to take the medication, choose the day you want to take it. For

example, if your Home Medication list says to take a medication once a week, you can choose to take it on Mondays. Write your choice on your Home Medication List next to the medication.

- If your Home Medication List doesn't say what time of day to take the medication, choose the time you want to take it. For example, if your Home Medication List says to take a medication daily but doesn't say what time of day, you can choose to take it every day in the morning. Write your choice on your Home Medication List next to the medication.

5. Put 1 dose of the medication in the matching space(s) in your pill box. For example:

- If your Home Medication List says to take the medication daily in the morning, put 1 dose in the morning space for the day.
- If your Home Medication List says to take the medication every 12 hours, put 1 dose in the morning space and 1 dose in the evening space for the day.

6. Put in all the doses of the medication for each day in your pill box or up until the day of your next clinic visit.

7. Put the cap back on the pill bottle. Put the bottle back where you store the medications you take on a schedule.

8. Repeat steps 1 to 7 for the next medication on your Home

Medication List.

When you're done filling your pill box, put it in a plastic bag. That way, if it's knocked and accidentally opens, the pills will spill into the bag.

Keep track of how much of each medication you have. Request refills 5 or more days before a medication will run out.

Sometimes, it takes a day or two for the medication to be ready.

It can be very dangerous to miss doses or take extra doses of your medications. Always take your medications the right way, at the right time, and at the right doses. For more information, read the resource *How to Take Your Medications Safely* (www.mskcc.org/pe/medication_safety). If you have any questions or concerns about your medications, call your doctor's office.

If you have any questions, contact a member of your healthcare team directly. If you're a patient at MSK and you need to reach a provider after 5:00 PM, during the weekend, or on a holiday, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

How to Fill Your Pill Box - Last updated on June 3, 2020

All rights owned and reserved by Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center