Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

How to Read a Prescription Medicine Label

This information will help you read a prescription medicine label.

What to look for on a prescription medicine label

Most prescription medicine labels have the same information. These labels often look different depending on which pharmacy you use.

It's important to know where to find the following information on prescription medicine labels:

- **Patient name:** This is your name or the name of the person the medicine is prescribed to.
- **Medicine name:** This may be either the generic name or the brand and generic names.
- **Medicine strength:** This is how strong each pill or tablet is.
- **Medicine quantity:** This is how many pills or tablets are in the container.
- **Refills remaining**. This helps you know how many times you can refill the prescription (get more of the medicine). Once you use all the refills, you will need a new prescription. Ask your healthcare provider to write a new prescription to get more of the medicine.
- **Instructions for use**. This tells you how to take the medicine. The instructions on your Home Medication List may be different than the instructions on the bottles. This can happen if your healthcare provider changes your medicine dose or schedule more often than you refill your medicine.

Below is an example of a label from MSK's pharmacy (see Figure 1).

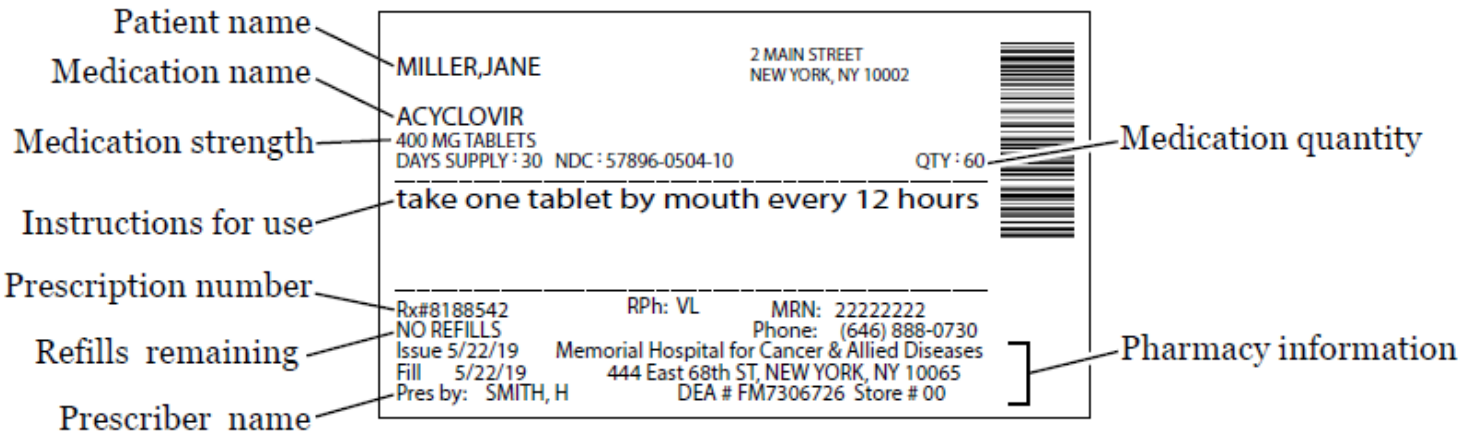


Figure 1. Example of a medicine label from MSK's pharmacy

Always follow the instructions on your Home Medication List, not the instructions on the medicine bottles. Your Home Medication List has the most up-to-date information about your medicine.

It's also helpful to know where to find:

- **Prescription number**. You'll need this number when you contact the pharmacy to refill the prescription.
- **Pharmacy information**. This is usually the pharmacy name, address, and phone number. It helps you contact the right pharmacy to refill the medicine or if you have questions.
- **Prescriber name**. This is the healthcare provider who prescribed you the medicine. It helps you know who to contact if you have questions or need a new prescription for the medicine.

If you're not sure how to read the label on your medicine, ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist for help.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

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

How to Read a Prescription Medicine Label - Last updated on October 1, 2026
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