Safe Medication Use
Patient Education

Take your medicine only as directed. Mistakes, misuse, or overdosing can cause serious health problems or death.

The goal of pain medicine is to help you live comfortably day to day. These medicines can help manage pain, but they can't always take it away entirely.

Prescription pain medicines are very strong drugs. Taking too much can cause serious side effects or death. Lowering your dose too quickly may cause withdrawal.

Avoid Overdose and Accidents

• **Be aware of side effects.** Common side effects of prescription pain medicines include drowsiness, confusion, dry mouth, nausea, vomiting, sweating, or constipation. Some ways to prevent these side effects are to take your medication with food, drink plenty of water, and take a stool softener.

• **Be aware of drug overdose.** Symptoms of drug overdose include severe sleepiness, trouble breathing, confusion, blue lips or fingernails, clammy cool skin, or difficulty waking up. If you suspect drug overdose, call 911 immediately.

• **Do not drink alcohol while taking prescription pain medicines.** The combination can be deadly.

• **Do not drive or operate machinery while on prescription pain medicine.**

• **Never take more than 4 grams (4,000 mg) of acetaminophen in 24 hours.** Taking more than that may damage your liver. Many over-the-counter and prescription medicines have it. These include Tylenol®, Lortab®, Vicodin®, Percocet® and others.

Avoid Misuse

• **Keep your medicines in a safe, secure place.** Make sure small children can't get to it. They often think pills are candy. Other people may be tempted to steal or abuse your medicines.

• **Never share your medicines or take someone else's.** This is not only illegal, but can also be deadly. Each person reacts differently to prescription pain medicines.

• **Never take expired medicines.** Pain medications should not be used after the expiration date on the label. Dispose of unused medicine properly. Your local police station can tell you how to dispose of them safely. NEVER pour medicines down the sink, toilet, or garbage disposal.

• **Tell your doctor all the supplements, vitamins, and medicines you take.** Mixing certain medicines or supplements with pain relievers can be dangerous.

• **Use the same pharmacy for all your prescriptions.** Pharmacists can identify possible drug interactions and can explain how to safely take your pain medicine.