

Preparing for a trip to the ER

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Headwaters - Your Health Matters

When you go to the emergency department what do you take with you?

You should bring your health card, insurance information and a complete list of all of your medications, legibly written or bring all your current pill bottles. Telling the emergency department nurse or doctor that you take a "little red capsule" for your blood pressure and a "blue and white one" for your cholesterol isn't specific enough information and could be potentially dangerous.

Trying to figure out what medications a patient is taking while they are in distress is not easy.

Taking over the counter medication herbal products in conjunction with prescribed medication can cause some serious complications with some individuals.

"Sometimes patients don't feel it is necessary to tell doctors or nurses they take over the counter or herbal products," Lori Miller, director of the emergency department at Headwaters, explains.

"Hospital staff need to know what you are currently taking, including both prescribed and non-prescribed medications, vitamins and herbal remedies to provide you with appropriate care during your emergency visit."

Pat, a grandmother of four, says, "I have a card that lists all my medications, which I update each time a new one is added or if the dosage is changed. The card has a place to list what my diagnoses are, the conditions I'm being treated for and any allergies I have. It lists my doctor and insurance information, along with my emergency contacts. I keep it in my purse."

If you are on a lot of medications, keep them organized in a plastic box with a lid. Put a copy of your medication list in the box and when you get new medications, update the list. This will keep all your medications in one place. The box can also be put out of reach to protect young children, and in an emergency, can be taken with you and provided to the paramedics and emergency department staff.

"The list is a great idea for patients who have multiple chronic conditions such as diabetes, kidney disease, asthma or a heart condition and have had several surgeries and other hospital admissions to carry a copy of their medical history with them in the event of a visit to their local emergency department," says Dr. Craig Donaldson, chief of the emergency medicine department at Headwaters.

As part of Headwaters Health Care Centre's patient safety and quality program, we are encouraging patients and family members to keep a list of all prescription medications, herbal products, dietary supplements and over-the-counter medications used and list any allergies to medications.

Include the dosage and frequency and any other important health information medical providers may need to know in an emergency along with a list of your emergency contacts. Make sure you carry a copy of the list in your wallet at all times in case of an emergency.

1. Keep your medication card with you at all times.
2. Use a pencil so that you can make changes when your medication changes.
3. Show your medication card to your doctor at every visit, at the hospital, in the emergency room and to your pharmacist.

"It's helpful to emergency — or any medical — personnel to know what medications, in what dose and frequency," Donaldson adds.

Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health providers with any questions you may have regarding a medical condition. A medication and emergency contact card is available at www.headwatershealth.ca so you can print it, cut it out and place in your wallet.