

Medical Noncompliance

In **medicine**, the term **noncompliance** is commonly used in regard to a patient who does not take a prescribed **medication** or follow a **prescribed course of treatment**.

In the United States, some 3.8 billion prescriptions are written every year, yet over 50% of them are taken incorrectly or not at all. In a survey of 1000 patients, nearly 75% admitted to not always taking their medications as directed. Even acute life changing events such as a heart attack - has been studied and revealed 24 % of this population did not fill the prescriptions needed to prevent another heart attack. Poor compliance accounts for 33%-69% of drug-related adverse events that result in hospital admissions.



Why are people noncompliant with medications? This is the \$290 billion dollar question – meaning this is how much poor compliance is estimated to cost the US healthcare system each year.

#1. Forgetfulness: Many people regardless of age admit to forgetting. Developing or maintaining a system or new habit of taking medications at the same time each day is required. There are pill boxes, simple to sophisticated that can remind you. Alarms that can be set on your smart phone or computer if you are frequently on an electronic device.

#2. Poor understanding of medication use/rationale: Ask questions or your medical provider and pharmacist to understand that purpose. Some medication regimens are complicated; some will be not be effective if not taken correctly. Written instructions can be provided.

#3. Fear of side effects: Again, ask questions, side effects that your neighbor's sister experienced will not necessarily be your experience. Medications are chosen based on your symptoms, diagnosis, other medical conditions as well as other medications that you are taking. Your medical provider is choosing the best medication for you.

#4. Do not believe there is a need: Elevated blood pressure, blood sugar, and cholesterol do not make you feel bad, most of the time there are no symptoms – so taking medication to control these is not well understood. The harmful effects of these conditions are not reversible; hence the reason for taking medication is to prevent damage to your body.

#5. Cost: Insurance plans should cover a significant portion. Ask your medical provider for a substitute if cost is prohibitive. This may not always be possible but is worth asking.

#6. Psychological reasons – depression over chronic illness, divorce, loss of job. Loss of control over health conditions. For some the mere need to take medication represents the individual is not well, hence denial of chronic conditions.

Example: When a medical provider prescribes a medication or treatment, it is assumed it will be followed. When a patient returns to the office with worsening symptoms - it again is our assumption that meds were taken and now the patient is worse despite the treatment. **This may result in over-treating, i.e. higher doses or additional medications that are not necessary.**

**You are the key to your own health, for
all treatments start and stop with you.**

...as former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop once put it with his customary forthrightness, "Drugs don't work in people who don't take them."

References provided upon request

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