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## Managing treatments and medications

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### Summary

- How serious your disability is will determine the kind of medical treatment you need.
  - The Department of Health & Human Services uses a self-directed approach to disability support services, which means that you and your family will need to make decisions about your medical treatment together.
  - Keeping a regular routine will help you to remember to take your medication and complete any other tasks necessary for your treatment.
  - If you are seeing multiple health professionals, it is a good idea to have one doctor who is the 'leader' of your healthcare team.
  - Tell your doctor about any medicines you are taking, including prescription, non-prescription (over-the-counter) and complementary medicines (such as herbal remedies and vitamin supplements).
  - If you do not feel your medication is working, or it is causing unwanted side effects, speak to your doctor. Do not stop taking the treatment without speaking to your doctor first.
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Once you have contacted disability support through the Victorian Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS), you will need to think about how you are going to manage your treatment and medication.

The type of disability will determine the kind of disability treatment you need. Some people will only be required to check in with their doctor or specialist, while others may have to rely on a team of health professionals looking after different areas of their treatment, such as physiotherapists, speech pathologists or audiologists.

### Getting disability support from family and friends

DHHS uses a self-directed approach to disability support services, which means that you and your family will need to make decisions about your medical treatment together. Talk to them about:

- how you would like to approach your disability treatment
- what is important to you
- what your health goals are.

If you are not comfortable talking to your family about it, contact your doctor or social worker and discuss your preferred treatment and lifestyle options with them. There are a lot of extra ways you and those that are caring for you can improve your general health, even if you are living with a severe disability.

Read more about what you can do on the [Managing your health](#) page.

### Managing your time

Keeping on top of regular healthcare appointments, medications, dietary requirements, medical diaries, equipment hire and any exercises that your doctor might suggest can be difficult – especially if you are getting used to a new situation following an injury or illness.

Try to incorporate everything into a set routine. Keeping a regular routine will help you stay positive, remember everything that you need to do, and then focus on other things that you enjoy. Keep a calendar handy (in your phone or on the wall) so you can write down any important dates and try to set reminders so you do not forget.

If you are having trouble remembering all of the things your treatment requires of you each day, ask your family or a friend to help out. It is much better that you ask for help than miss important healthcare appointments or take the wrong dose of your medication.

### Talking with your doctor

The most important thing when speaking with your doctor is to be honest and upfront. To make the best

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assessment of your progress, your doctor will need to have a full understanding of where you are at and how you are feeling. Do not tell the doctor that you have been following their advice if you have not been able to. Be honest about any lifestyle habits such as smoking, illicit drug use, diet and exercise.

If you are seeing multiple health professionals, it is a good idea to have one doctor who is the 'leader' of your healthcare team. They will be able to track your overall progress and make sure that you do not take medications or treatments that counteract each other.

Be as specific as you can about your symptoms and any side effects from your medications. Keep a journal and write down when you experience certain symptoms and if they follow any particular events, such as after eating or going to the bathroom.

Take notes during your doctor's appointment or bring a support person with you to help you remember the information. Ask for printed information to take home with you if necessary.

Make sure you are clear about the doctor's instructions before you leave. For example, ask: When you say to get more exercise, what kind of exercise and how often?

If you don't understand something, ask for clarification.

Read more on the [Seeing a doctor or general practitioner](#) page.

### **After a hospital visit**

After a hospital stay, you may need to have regular check-ups with either your treating doctor from hospital or your local doctor. This will allow your healthcare team to monitor your recovery and general wellbeing. The nature of this follow-up care will depend on the type of treatment you had, taking into account any side effects that you experience.

Some people will recover quicker than others and some will need ongoing therapy to stay mobile or to do the things they did before an accident or onset of an illness. Whatever your condition, it is a good idea to settle into a routine of medication, exercises and visits with your doctor so you can slowly get back to doing some of the activities you enjoy.

Coming to terms with a new way of life can take a long time and the path ahead may seem unclear. If you find you are struggling with your recovery emotionally, speak with your doctor, social worker or counsellor.

Read more on the [Surgical recovery and rehabilitation](#) page.

### **Working with allied health professionals**

Depending on how severe your disability is, you may need a range of services to live independently, from specialist services, mobility aids and in-home support to ongoing medical treatment.

As part of your treatment, your doctor may suggest other health services, such as physiotherapy, chiropractic treatment, speech pathology or occupational therapy. These services are called 'allied health services'. District nursing (nurses who visit you at home) may also be recommended.

Working with an allied health practitioner might increase your mobility, independence and ability to care for yourself. They can also help reduce the risk of complications in long-term conditions or following illness or injury. Do your best to follow their instructions but be honest with them if you are finding something painful or too difficult to continue with on a regular basis. It is their job to help you achieve your health goals, so they can adjust the treatment to suit your needs.

### **Using medications**

Tell all your doctors about any medicines you are taking, including prescription, non-prescription (over-the-counter) and complementary medicines (such as herbal remedies and vitamin supplements). They will advise you on any medicines that could cause unwanted effects.

If your doctor has prescribed medication, you will need to visit a pharmacy to have your prescription filled. Ask the pharmacist questions if you are unsure about your medication. They may be able to provide you with extra information to help you understand your prescription, over-the-counter or herbal medicines.

The pharmacist may offer you a 'generic' brand of medication that is cheaper than the brand your doctor prescribed. Ask the pharmacist to explain any differences between what was prescribed and the generic brand.

The choice is then up to you. Sometimes your doctor will specify that you should not substitute for a generic brand. If this is the case, follow your doctor's instructions.

If, once you start taking the medication, you have problems with your treatment:

- Do not change the treatment without speaking to your doctor.
- Tell your doctor if you have stopped the treatment and why.
- Work with your doctor to find a treatment that works better for you.

Find out more on the [Safe medication use](#) page.

### **Medication when you leave hospital**

After leaving hospital, make sure you understand what medication you need to take, how you need to take it and how often.

If you do not feel your medication is working, or it is causing unwanted side effects, speak to your doctor. Do not stop taking the medical treatment without speaking to your doctor first. Your doctor might change the dosage or be able to prescribe an alternative that suits you better.

If you get any unexpected side effects that your doctor or pharmacist did not warn you about, contact your doctor immediately.

### **Mental health medication**

Like anyone, people who are living with a disability can experience a range of mental health issues. Sometimes these mental illnesses can be triggered by a drastic change in lifestyle or circumstance – such as an accident or the onset of a serious illness.

A doctor may prescribe medication for a mental health condition. Different types of medication treat different types of mental illness. Medication can be helpful for managing mental health issues, whether for a short time or to manage your condition forever.

If you have been prescribed medication it is important that you understand how to take it, why you are taking it and what to do if you have unexpected or serious side effects.

Find out more on the [Managing mental health medications](#) and [Medicines and side effects](#) page.

### **Where to get help**

- Your doctor
- Your healthcare team
- Your pharmacist
- Allied health professionals
- Local community health centre
- Disability service providers

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Better Health Channel - (need new cp)

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