

Read the label on your prescription medicines. Knowing how to take the right dose, in the right way, is important for your health.

A pharmacy dispensing label is found on every prescription medicine you receive from your pharmacist. An example is shown below. The following refers to the information found on this label.

## Name

Most labels carry two names. One name is the active ingredient of the medicine. This is the chemical that makes the medicine work. The other is the brand name, which is given to the medicine by the company that made it. Most medicines have the brand name on top and the name of the active ingredient on the bottom of the label. Sometimes it's the other way around and sometimes prescription medicines only have the name of the active ingredient on the label.

Knowing the active ingredients in your medicines is important because taking two medicines with the same or similar active ingredients can be dangerous.

On this label, the name of the active ingredient is simvastatin and the brand name is Superstat (this is a fictitious brand).

## Strength

All pharmacy dispensing labels tell you the strength of the medicine. Most tablets and capsules tell you the weight of the active ingredient. This label says there are 10 mg (or milligrams) of simvastatin in each tablet.

Most liquids, creams, lotions and injections tell you the concentration of the active ingredient. That is, they tell you how much of the active ingredient is in a certain amount of the liquid.

Nearly all medicines come in different strengths. For example, simvastatin tablets come in strengths of 5 mg, 10 mg, 20 mg, 40 mg and 80 mg. Knowing the strength of your medicine, as well as its name, helps you avoid taking too much or too little.

## Parts of a prescription medicine label

The diagram shows a prescription label with the following text and annotations:

- Brand name:** SUPERSTAT
- Strength:** 10mg
- Concession rate:** \$00.00
- Number of tablets:** 30
- Active ingredient:** [Simvastatin]
- Instructions:** Take ONE tablet at night.
- Special instructions or warnings:** Avoid eating grapefruit or drinking grapefruit juice.
- Patient's name:** Mr A. Contos
- Doctor who prescribed medicine:** Dr D Thorpe
- Date medicine was dispensed:** 20/10/2011
- Pharmacy that dispensed medicine:** DOWNTOWN PHARMACY, 64 Brisbane St, Perth WA 7009 Tel 09 6556 6556
- Full cost of medicine:** \$00.00

## Instructions and warnings

The instructions on the pharmacy dispensing label tell you how much medicine to take, how often to take it and for how many days. It may tell you if you should take the medicine with food or after food. For example, the Superstat label tells you to *'Take one tablet with a glass of water once a day'*.

The pharmacist label may also carry a warning, such as *'Do not drive or operate machinery while taking this medicine'*. The Superstat label tells you to *'Avoid eating grapefruit or drinking grapefruit juice.'*

Knowing how to take your medicine correctly is important as it can make a difference to how well the medicine works. It can also help you avoid problems from taking too much medicine.

Also, follow any special storage instructions and check the expiry date of the medicine. This may be found on the medicine's packaging. Medicines should be taken to your local pharmacist for disposal once they have expired.

## For more information

If you are unsure about a medicine, talk to your doctor or pharmacist.

You can also contact Medicines Line on **1300 633 424**, NPS at **[www.nps.org.au](http://www.nps.org.au)**, or the Consumers Health Forum of Australia at **[www.chf.org.au](http://www.chf.org.au)**.



NPS and CHF are partners in the Community Quality Use of Medicines program.

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