

Learn to read your **prescription**

Famous author Mark Twain wrote, in 1864, that doctors should “discard abbreviations... to avoid the possibility of mistakes.” We agree!

A prescription for medicine should not be a mystery to understand. Many abbreviations and words in prescriptions come from Latin.

We’d like to help by explaining each part of a typical prescription and translating some of the Latin abbreviations into English words.

anatomy of a prescription

A Your doctor's information. Most prescriptions will show your doctor's name, address, telephone number, and medical license number. This helps you and your pharmacist call if there are questions. It also helps the pharmacist list the correct doctor in the pharmacy computer system, especially since some doctors' signatures are hard to read.

B Your information. Your name should be clearly written on prescriptions. Be sure it is spelled correctly before you give it to your pharmacist. Also be sure your age (or your child's age) is on the prescription. Your doctor may not be required to include your birth date or address. Each state has its own laws. However, you should add this information

to the prescription before you give it to your pharmacist just in case someone has the same name or a similar name.

C Date. Your doctor is required to include the date on which the prescription was signed.

D Rx. This is the symbol used for “prescription.” It has many possible origins. It may stem from an ancient

symbol for the eye of the Egyptian god Horus, who was called the “father of pharmacy.” It could also stem from the Latin word *recipe* meaning “take thou.”

E Medicine name and strength. This is where your doctor writes the name of the medicine and the strength prescribed. Writing both the brand and generic names is

helpful to the pharmacist so that the medicine prescribed is less likely to be misread as another medicine with a similar name. Adding a zero before the decimal point for very small doses (0.25 mg, not .25 mg), and never adding a zero to whole number doses (1 not 1.0) also helps make sure that no

mistake happens because the decimal point is not seen.

F Disp. Your doctor will tell the pharmacist the total number of tablets or how much liquid medicine to give you.

G Sig. This is an abbreviation for the instructions on how to take or use your medicine. It stems from the Latin word *signa* (write) or *signetur* (let it be labeled). These are the directions the pharmacist will place on the label that goes on your medicine. Many times, additional abbreviations are used to describe when and how to take or use your medicine. You can use the table on the following page to help translate the more common abbreviations used.

A Jane Doe, M.D.
Internal Medicine
Local Medical Center
1234 Main Street
Anywhere, ST 12345
(888) 555-0000
(888) 555-0111 fax
Medical License # XX-0998867-X

B Name of Patient: Shirley Temple
Address: _____

C Age: 60
Date: 6/15/05

D Rx Amoxicillin 400 mg Chewable tabs

E Disp: #50

F Sig: Chew 2 tablets po bid x 14 days for ear infection

G Refill times

H Label

I Substitution permissible _____ Jane Doe, M.D.

J In order for a brand name product to be dispensed, the prescriber must hand write "Brand Necessary" or "Brand Medically Necessary" in the space below.

K Not for Legal Use

continued ▼

H Indication. In this section, your doctor should list the reason you will be taking the medicine. Again, this information helps the pharmacist avoid misreading the prescribed medicine as a different medicine with a similar name. Medicines with similar names are often used to treat totally different conditions.

I Refills. In this section, your doctor will tell the pharmacist how many times the prescription can be

refilled before you need a new prescription.

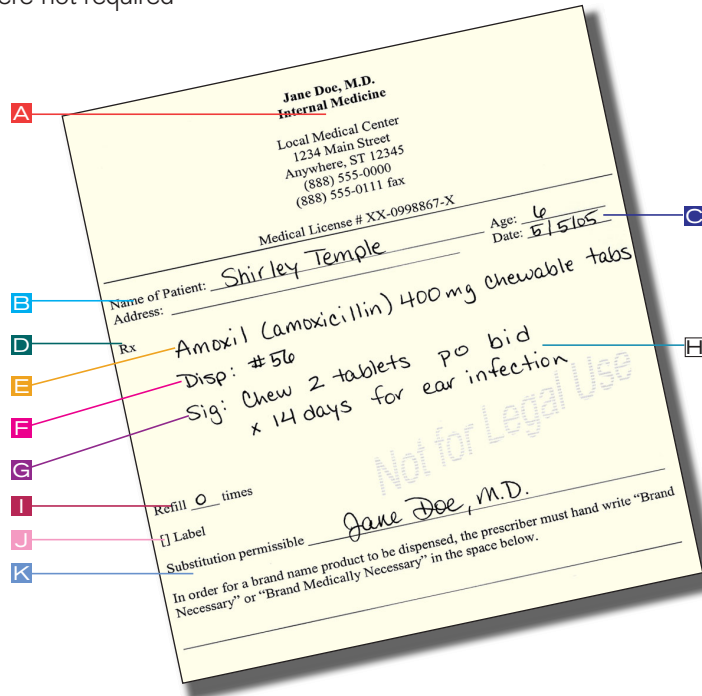
J Label. In years past, pharmacists were not required

to print the name of the medicine on the label. The doctor would have to check this box to ask the pharmacist

to do this. Today, pharmacists always include the name of the medicine on the label for safety

reasons. But a checkbox for “Label” may still appear on your prescription, leftover from many years ago.

K Substitution permissible. If available, all prescriptions can be filled with a generic medicine (equal to the brand medicine prescribed) if your doctor signs the prescription on this line. If your doctor wants the pharmacist to give you a specific brand of medicine, he or she must specifically note this or sign in the space provided.



Common abbreviation	Latin words that make up the abbreviation	The meaning on your prescription
ac	ante cibum	before meals
bid	bis in die	twice a day
gtt	gutta	drop (as in 1 drop, 2 drops, and so on)
hs	hora somni	at bedtime
od*	oculus dexter	right eye
os	oculus sinister	left eye
po	per os	by mouth
pc	post cibum	after meals
prn	pro re nata	as needed
qd**	quaque die	every day, or daily
qid	quarter in die	4 times a day
tid	ter in die	3 times a day

*Sometimes, od is used to mean “once daily.” The word “daily” should be used instead to prevent mistakes.

**The abbreviation qd is considered dangerous. It should not be used because it has been mistaken as qid frequently. This mistake has led to serious harm, since people took once-a-day medicine four times each day.

Contact Information



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