



Curiosity Can Save Your Life

WHEN JODY FAIN finished breast-feeding her second child, she went to her ob-gyn to get a new prescription for birth control. The doctor

prescribed Ortho Evra, a birth control patch. After two weeks, Fain was admitted to the hospital with severe migraines. Then she suffered a grand mal seizure and a stroke

caused by a blood clot. Testing revealed that the patch was the most likely cause; research suggests it carries a higher risk of clotting than birth control pills.

"My doctor and I barely discussed the prescription," says Fain. "She said I was basically trading the pill for the patch, and there was no mention of increased risks or side effects." That lack of communication is all too common, suggests a recent survey by UCLA and UC Davis researchers: Nearly half the time, patients walked out of their doctor's office without knowing when or how often to take their medication, and only 35 percent were warned about side effects.

"Even if a doctor seems rushed, patients should take the initiative and ask questions when getting new prescriptions," says Derjung Tarn, MD, PhD, the study's lead researcher. "Patients shouldn't feel shy or embarrassed about this."

The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality suggests patients quiz their doctor or pharmacist about their prescription medications.

10 Questions You Must Ask

1. What are the drug's generic and brand names?
2. What is it supposed to do?
3. Is it okay to substitute a less expensive generic medicine for the brand-name version? Will it achieve the same effect?
4. What's the proper dosage?
5. Are there foods, drinks, supplements, medicines, or activities I should avoid while taking this medicine?
6. What are the possible side effects of the medicine? What should I do if they occur?
7. What should I do if I miss a dose?
8. What should I do if I accidentally take more than the recommended dose?
9. How many refills can I get?
10. Is there any written information I can take home with me?

—KATHLEEN SLATTERY-MOSCHKAU