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## INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE SAFE USE OF MEDICINES

MEDICINES INFORMATION NETWORK

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LUOTETTAVAN  
LÄÄKETIEDON  
PUOLESTA  
Lääkeinformaatioverkosto

# Instructions for the safe use of medicines

Do you take any medicines?  
If you do, this guide is for you.

There are many things to consider when using medicines.

This guide contains important instructions  
on the use of medicines.

The medicine has been prescribed to you to cure an illness,  
to prevent an illness or to alleviate the symptoms of an illness.

This guide tells you how to use medicines correctly and safely. The  
medicine will help only if you take it at the right time,  
in the right amounts and in the right way.

**Always ask health care or the pharmacy for advice  
if you are unsure!**

Health care means places such as the health centre,  
and the doctors and nurses working there.

Under the law, doctors and the pharmacists at the pharmacy  
have the obligation to advise on the right and safe use of medicines.

**Please note that, although they are not mentioned in this guide, there  
may also be other instructions related to your medicine.**

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National Medicines Information Network

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## Part 1: Safe use of medicines

### 1. How do I participate in the planning of my medication?

You, the doctor and the pharmacy

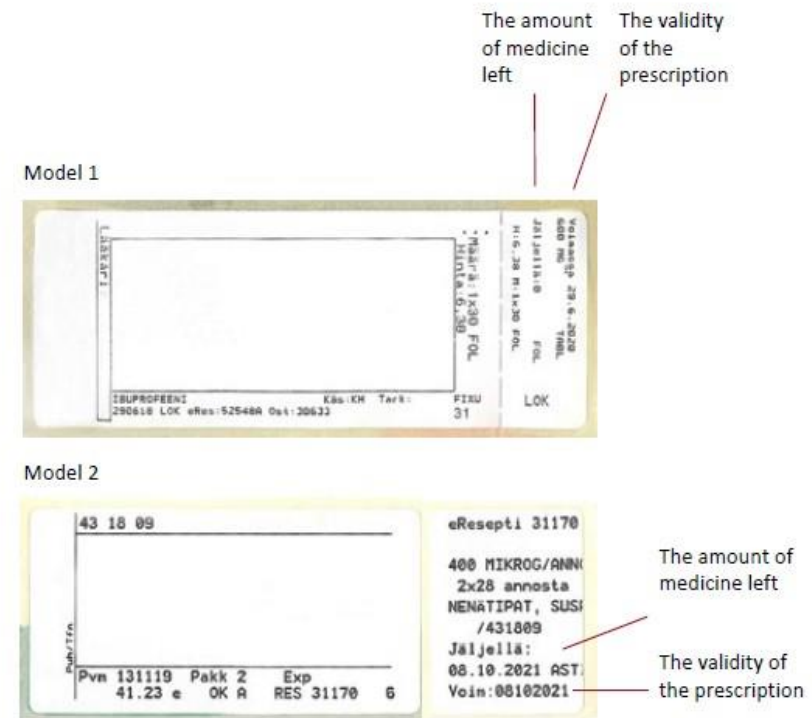
all participate in the planning of your medication.

It is important that you discuss your medicines with the doctor and at the pharmacy.

You can participate in the following ways:

- Plan your medication together with the doctor.
- Tell the doctor about matters that affect the choice of the medicines, such as your drug allergies.
- Tell the doctor if you do not have enough money for the medicines.
- Make sure that you know why, how and when you take the medicines.
- Always ask, if something is not clear to you.

Follow the instructions that you receive from the doctor or the pharmacy.



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## 2. What medicine forms are there?

Medicines come in different forms.

The different forms of medicine

include tablets, drops and creams.

Each medicine form involves matters

that you must consider when taking the medicine.

You should always check the package leaflet for information about taking your medicine before you start taking it. The package leaflet means the instructions inside the package.

Keep the package leaflet.

If it is difficult to keep it inside the package, you can keep it in a folder, for example.

You can also find the package leaflets on the internet.

You can ask the pharmacy or health care for more information.

Examples of different medicine forms.

- Tablets
- Capsules
- Oral dispersible tablets
- Medicated plasters
- Liquid medicines
- Injectable medicines
- Inhalable medicines
- Eye drops and eye creams
- Nasal sprays
- Suppositories and enemas
- Pharmaceutical creams
- Ear drops and ear creams
- Oral sprays

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### 3. How do I administer my medicine?

Take the medicine at the right time.

Check with the doctor or the pharmacy whether you need to take your medicine at a certain time of the day.

- **Once a day:**  
Take the medicine once a day  
and at the same time every day,  
for example, at 8 o'clock in the morning.
- **Twice a day:**  
Take the medicine every 12 hours,  
in the morning and in the evening.
- **3 times a day:**  
Take the medicine every 8 hours,  
early in the morning, during the day and late in the  
evening.
- **4 times a day:**  
Take the medicine every 6 hours:  
early in the morning, during the day, in the evening  
and late in the evening just before you go to bed.

In other words, take the medicine at regular intervals  
during the 24 hours.

If the instructions tell you to take the medicine  
3 times a day, you can take the medicine  
at 7.00, 15.00 and 24.00, for example.

You can change the times  
to suit your daily rhythm.

You usually do not need to  
wake up at night to take your medicine.

If you have to take the medicine several times a day,  
ask your doctor  
when is the best time to take it.

**A course of medicine** means that  
you take the medicine only for a short time,  
for example, antibiotics for one week.

**Regular medication** means that  
you take the medicine at regular intervals,  
usually every day.

For example, you must take a blood thinning medicine  
every day according to the doctor's instructions.

Regular medication usually lasts long  
and you may have to take for the rest of your life.

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**A medicine taken as required** means that you take it only if you have a symptom.

For example, you take a painkiller when you have a headache.

Always ask your doctor how long your medication is for.

**Some medicines are taken on an empty stomach and some with food.**

**On an empty stomach** means that you take the medicine one hour before eating or two hours after eating.

When you have to **take the medicine with food**, porridge or a sandwich and some water is enough.



## Instructions for the safe use of medicines

Stand or sit when you take the medicine.

Do not lie down straight after you have taken the medicine.

Always drink at least one glass of water when you take the medicine.

If it is difficult for you to swallow the medicine,

- try swallowing the medicine with yoghurt, buttermilk or berry soup if you are allowed to eat at the same time.
- cut the medicine in half if you are allowed to do it.
- If necessary, ask the pharmacy for aids or a liquid that makes swallowing easier.
- ask your doctor whether it is possible to change the medicine for a different one.





Instructions for the safe use of medicines

#### 4. Can I cut my medicine in half or crush it?

You can cut a tablet in half

if it has a groove, a line in the middle.

You must usually not cut or crush capsules.

There are also tablets that you must not cut in half or crush.

If you cut such tablets in half or crush them, they may release too much of the drug at once.

The medicine may also affect in the wrong place in your system or cause adverse reactions.

Pharmaceutical tablets that you must not usually cut in half or crush:

- extended-release tablets and capsules, which are longacting
- enteric-coated tablets and capsules, which are absorbed in the intestine
- sublingual tablets, which are placed under the tongue

The package leaflet will tell you whether you can cut your medicine in half or crush it.

Also, you can always ask the pharmacy or health care for advice.



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## 5. What kind of aids exist for taking medicine?

There are many kinds of aids that make it easier to take the medicine.

For example, such aids include:

- pill dispensers
- tablet cutters
- tablet crushers
- eye drop guides
- openers for screw tops and caps
- medication reminders, also mobile applications



Pill dispensers.

If you take a large number of medicines, you can use a pill dispenser.

Put the medicines into the pill dispenser for one week at a time, for example.

The pill dispenser is also a great help if it is difficult for you to remember to take your medicine.

Put a note next to the dispenser about the medicines that you cannot put inside the pill dispenser.

You can ask more about the aids at the pharmacy.

### 5.1 Dose-dispensing by the pharmacy

Automated dose-dispensing of medicines means that a machine packs the medicines into small plastic bags. One bag contains the medicines that you take in one go.

Only medicines that you take regularly are suitable for dose-dispensing.

You can usually get these single-dose bags for two weeks at a time.

Your name, the names and strengths of the medicines, and the times for taking the medicines are usually marked on the dose bag.

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Before starting the dose-dispensing,

the pharmacist checks your medication.

The pharmacist checks that the medicines are compatible and do not overlap.

If any of the medicines have to be changed

on the basis of the check-up,

the pharmacist will discuss it with the doctor.

It is always the doctor who makes the decision

on changes made to the medication.



Medicines in a dose bag.

## 6. What should I do if I forget to take my medicine?

If you forget to take your medicine at the right time

or you vomit it,

check the instructions in the package leaflet.

You can also ask the pharmacy or health care for advice.

## 7. What should I do if I take too much medicine?

If you take too much medicine,

see the instructions in the package leaflet.

You can also ask the pharmacy,

health care or the Poison Information Centre for advice.

The number of the Poison Information Centre is

0800 147 111 (calls are free). The Poison Information

Centre is always open. You can call the Centre at any

time of the day, even at night.

Never take medicines that have been prescribed for

someone else. Do not give your own prescription

medicines to anyone else.

Instructions for the safe use of medicines

## 8. How does the list of medicines help me?

The list of medicines is an up-to-date list of all the medicines that you take.

The list of medicines is important especially when you take a large number of medicines.

The list of medicines is helpful when you discuss your treatment with healthcare professionals or when your medication is planned.

The list of medicines may help you and healthcare professionals, for example,

- manage your medication as a whole: you will know your medicines and their indications when you have written them in the list of medicines.
- identify overlapping medications,
- spot medicines that are incompatible. All over-the-counter drugs, food supplements and natural products are not necessarily compatible with prescription drugs or one another.

The list of medicines also saves time as it is known what medicines you take.

### 8.1 What is the list of medicines?

The list of medicines is a list of the medicines that you take.

The list of medicines includes

- prescription medicines prescribed by a doctor
- over-the-counter medicines that you get from the pharmacy
- food supplements
- vaccines
- drug allergies.

In the list of medicines, record the names, doses and indications of all the medicinal products that you take.

The list of medicines may be on paper or it can be maintained electronically. Templates for electronic list of medicines are available online.

You can request a template for a list of medicines from health care of the pharmacy. Add the prescription drugs, over-the-counter drugs, food supplements and natural products you take to the list yourself. You can ask staff in health care or at the pharmacy to help you with drawing up the list of medicines.

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### Examples:

- Over-the-counter medicines include painkillers, heartburn medicines, nasal sprays to ease stuffiness of the nose and mild cortisone creams.
- Nutritional supplements include calcium tablets and fish oil products.
- Food supplements include products made of Saint John's wort and ginkgo.  
Such products are also often called natural products.

Always update your list of medicines when there are changes in your medication.

**Keep the list of medicines with you at all times and show it to the professional at the pharmacy or in health care.**

### List of medicines

Name

Date of birth  List of medicines date

▶▶ Enter any prescription and over-the-counter medicines, herbal remedies and food supplements you are using in the form. Always update the list accordingly when any changes are made to your medication. Ask your doctor to also enter them in your medical record.

▶▶ Keep the list with you at all times so that health care professionals can give you appropriate treatment in the event of a sudden fit of illness or accident.

▶▶ You may print out additional copies of the form here: [www.sopivalaake.fi/laakityslista](http://www.sopivalaake.fi/laakityslista)

▶▶ You can view your prescriptions at: [www.omakanta.fi/en](http://www.omakanta.fi/en)

Name and strength of medicine	Purpose of use	Dosage	Additional information

## 9. How do I monitor whether my medication is in order?

You can sometimes feel that your medicinal treatment is successful yourself when you start to feel better or the symptoms ease. However, different tests are often needed to determine it. The monitoring of the success of the medicinal treatment also depends on the illness.

To know whether your treatment is successful, ask your doctor what the aim of your medicinal treatment is and what its intended effects are.

The success of the medicinal treatment can be monitored in the following ways, for example:

- the symptoms ease,
- the laboratory test results improve
- (e.g., blood pressure or blood cholesterol values),
- you have fewer seizures or they end.

The medicine may also cause adverse reactions or there may be problems in using the medicines at home.

If the medicine does not help, you get adverse reactions or you have problems with taking the medicines, contact health care or the pharmacy.

You can ask your doctor or the pharmacy to review your medication as a whole.

They will then ensure that the medicines you take are compatible and that you do not have any unnecessary or overlapping medications.

Possible changes to your medication are always agreed together with the doctor.

You can also assess the success of your medicinal treatment with the

[Checklist for good medication \(available in Finnish\).](#)

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## 10. Why and how is medication discontinued?

There are many different reasons for why medication may have to be discontinued.

For example, the symptom may be cured, the medicine may cause adverse reactions or it may no longer help.

You can stop taking some medicines straight away and completely.

However, there are many medicines that you have to discontinue gradually.

Among other things, such medicines may cause withdrawal symptoms if you discontinue them suddenly.

You should therefore never stop taking a medicine before you have discussed it with the doctor.

The doctor will give you instructions for how to discontinue the medication.

If you are wondering whether your medicine is necessary for you, ask your doctor. Sometimes, the doctor may suggest that you discontinue the medicinal treatment. Tell the doctor if something about discontinuing the medicine worries you. Monitor your condition after discontinuing the medicine.

## 11. How do I store my medicines?

Correct storage of medicines guarantees that the medicines will be effective and safe until their expiry date.

You will find the storage instructions on the side of the package and in the package leaflet.

- Medicines can usually be stored in room temperature (18–25 °C).
- Some medicines must be stored in the fridge (+2–+8 °C).
- If no particular storage instructions are specified on the package and in the package leaflet, the product does not require any special storage conditions.

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The best place for storing medicines is usually a locked medicine cabinet for example, in the kitchen or a walk-in wardrobe.

Do not place the medicine cabinet into a humid space. Humidity and heat may reduce the effectiveness and safety of the medicine.

Sometimes you must use the medicine, for example, within 4 weeks or six months from opening the package. In that case, you should mark the date of opening the package on the package.

You can ask the pharmacy for advice on how to store your medicine.

## 12. How do I dispose of expired and unnecessary medicines?

Do not use expired medicines.

The shelf life of the medicine can be checked from its packaging.

For example, the following marking may be on the packaging: "Käyt. viim. 12–2025" or "EXP 12–2025".

They mean that you can take the medicine until the end of December 2025.

Take expired medicines to a pharmacy to be disposed of. Also take medicines that you have not used.

Medicines are dangerous waste and require specific disposal methods.

Medicines must not be disposed of with household waste. Hand in mercury thermometers and medicines containing iodine separately from other medicines.



Take expired medicines to a pharmacy to be disposed of.



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### 13. Where can I find reliable information about my medicines?

In emergencies, always call the emergency number **112**.

You will find information about the medicine on the package and in the package leaflet. You can always ask the doctor, the nurse or the pharmacy about the medicine.

You can also call different helplines to ask about medicines. On the helplines, healthcare professionals answer questions.

For example, these helplines include:

- University Pharmacy's pharmaceutical advice and customer service, which you can ask about matters related to medicines by phone (tel. 0300 20200, EUR 0.85 per minute + local network charge/mobile call charge) or in a chat (free of charge).
- Teratology Information Service, which provides advice on the use of medicines during pregnancy (tel. (09) 4717 6500, 9.00–13.00 from Monday to Friday, normal call charges apply).

Reliable information on medicines is also available online.

Good sources of information on medicines include the following:

- [Terveyskirjasto.fi](#), in which you can find information on the treatment of illnesses and on medicinal treatments (in Finnish).
- [Current Care Guidelines for patients](#)
- [Apteekki.fi](#), in which you can find advice on self-care, information about the prices of medicines and pharmacy services and a template for the medication list (in Finnish).
- [A drug guide in the Terveyskirjasto health library](#), which contains information about medicinal products (in Finnish).
- [Kela.fi/laakkeet](#), in which you can find information on reimbursements for medicine expenses.
- [Kela.fi Medicinal Products Database](#), in which you can find information about the prices of medicines.
- [Fimea, Correct use of medicines](#), which contains information about the appropriate use of medicines.
- [The Medicines Education Portal](#), which contains basic information on medicines.

## Instructions for the safe use of medicines

- [Lääketalo \(House of medicine\) in the Health Village service](#), which contains information about medication, the appropriate use of medicines and problem situations (in Finnish).
- [Facebook site: Tunne lääkkeesi \(Know your medicines\)](#), through which the National Medicines Information Network distributes information on medicines (in Finnish).

## Part 2: Reimbursements for medicines and visiting the pharmacy

### 1. How are medicines reimbursed?

Kela pays a reimbursement for the medicines that a doctor has prescribed to you.

You usually get the Kela reimbursement directly at the pharmacy. Medicines are reimbursed according to different reimbursement categories. The rates for medicines are basic and special rate of reimbursement. Medical certificate B written by the doctor is required for the special rate of reimbursement. The certificate is submitted to Kela.

Medical certificate B is not required for the basic rate of reimbursement.

The different reimbursement categories of medicines are described on [Kela's website](#). You can also ask about them at the pharmacy. Always take with you your Kela card or the patient instructions when you visit the pharmacy.

The reimbursements for medicines have an initial deductible, which is valid for one calendar year at a time.

In 2024, the initial deductible is EUR 50.

This means that you pay the full price of your medicines at the beginning of the year until you reach the limit of the initial deductible, EUR 50.

After that, you will get the reimbursement for the medicines.

The initial deductible is applied from the beginning of the year of the person's 19th birthday.

All medicines are not reimbursed by Kela. You can ask for more information about reimbursements at the pharmacy.

### 2. How often can I get reimbursable medicines from the pharmacy?

You can get medicines from the pharmacy for a maximum of 3 months at a time. It means 90 days of medication. The pharmacy uses the dosage instructions to calculate how many packages of the medicine Kela will reimburse at a time.

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You will not get more medicine from the pharmacy until you have almost used the product you bought the previous time. The pharmacy calculates the time between your purchases on the basis of the dosage instructions in the prescription.

You can buy the reimbursable medicine at the earliest

- three weeks before the previous batch ends, if the amount you bought previously was for three months' use.
- two weeks before the previous batch ends, if the amount you bought previously was for two months' use.
- one week before the previous batch ends if the amount you bought previously was for one month's use or less.

### 3. What does the annual out-of-pocket maximum mean?

The reimbursed medicine expenses have an annual initial deductible, a so-called annual out-of-pocket maximum.

In 2024, the annual out-of-pocket maximum is EUR 626,94.

The initial deductible (EUR 50)

is included in the annual out-of-pocket maximum.

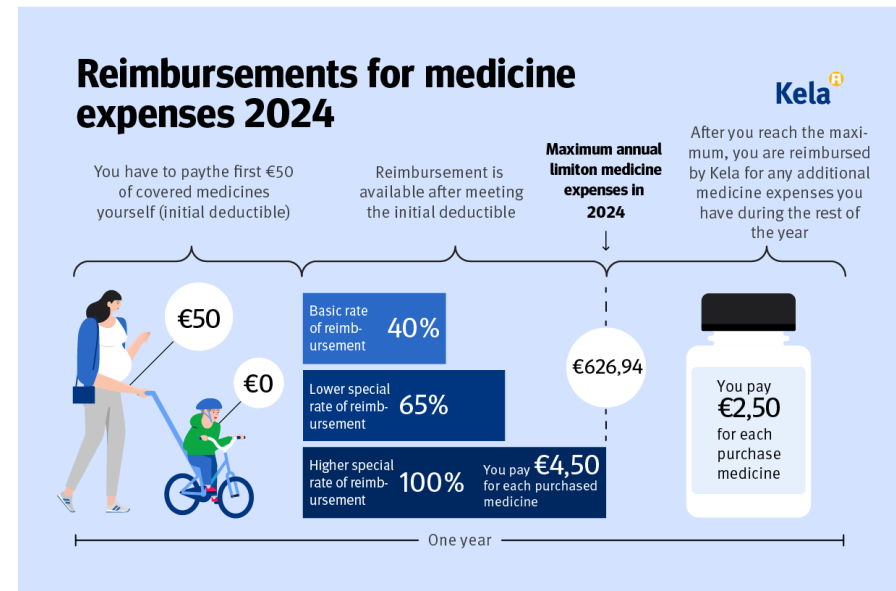
When you have reached the out-of-pocket maximum, you will only pay EUR 2.50

for your reimbursable medicine for the rest of the year.

Kela monitors your medicine expenses.

When you exceed the out-of-pocket maximum,

Kela will notify you and the pharmacy.



Picture: Kela.

Instructions for the safe use of medicines

#### 4. What does generic substitution mean?

The pharmacy has the obligation to tell you, if there is a cheaper version of the medicine.

Your consent is required for generic substitution. With your consent, the medicine can be changed for a cheaper corresponding product.

However, you always have the right to refuse generic substitution.

In that case, you will pay the part exceeding the cheaper price.

The prescriber of the medicine may also prohibit the substitution based on medical or care-related justifications. You will then get a reimbursement for the whole price.

Generic substitution is safe.

Mutually interchangeable products contain an equal amount of the same active substance.

#### 5. What information can you see in My Kanta?

My Kanta is a web service for citizens.

In My Kanta, you can see what information has been recorded about you and your medicines in health care. You can log into the service on the Kanta services website and at [omakanta.fi](https://omakanta.fi).

My Kanta shows

- your prescriptions,
- the entries related to your treatment,
- your laboratory and X-ray results,
- the information of a child aged under 10, whose guardian you are.

In My Kanta, you can

- request the renewal of a prescription
- save your living will or organ donation testament,
- give consent to the disclosure of your personal data or prohibit its disclosure,

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- give consent to the disclosure of prescription details to a pharmacy in another European country,
- browse your health information.

To use My Kanta, you must have a Finnish personal identity code and will need to identify yourself.

For identifying yourself, you can use

- your online banking codes,
- a mobile certificate,
- an electronic ID card.

## 6. How can I act on behalf of another person at a pharmacy?

Another person can get your medicines from the pharmacy for you.

Acting on your behalf is possible if the other person brings with them your patient instructions for the prescription or your Kela card.

It is also possible if you have given the person an electronic mandate for acting on your behalf at the pharmacy in [Suomi.fi Web Service](#).

The person fetching the medicine must know what medicine they should buy.

If the person fetching the medicine uses the mandate, they must also know your personal identity code.

An electronic authorisation granted through [Suomi.fi Web Service](#) is required for managing other matters related to prescriptions at pharmacies.

The authorisation may also be the consent form for the prescription after it has been filled in and signed. You can get it from pharmacies, health care or Kela's service points.

If you authorise another person, that person can go to the pharmacy and

- find out the medicines you take
- request a summary of the medicines that you take
- request that your prescription is invalidated when you no longer need the medicine.
- request a renewal of your prescription.

## 7. How can I act on behalf of an underage person at a pharmacy and in My Kanta?

The guardian of an underage child can manage all the matters related to the child's prescriptions at the pharmacy and in health care.

The guardian may act on behalf of their child in My Kanta. The guardian signs into My Kanta using their own username and password.

At the top of the page, the guardian selects the link to the child's information.

The guardian then selects the child whose information they want to see.

The guardian can do the following on behalf of the child in My Kanta:

- view prescriptions and health information that has been recorded in the Kanta services as from 1 August 2016,
- request the renewal of a prescription,
- confirm receipt of information concerning the services,
- give consent concerning the Kanta services.

## The authors

This guide has been drawn up by the Medicines Information Network's working group on medicines information for medicine users.

The first version of the guide was drawn up in 2019 by:

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- Heidi Suolanko, carer, expert by experience in informal care, The Association of Carers in Helsinki and Vantaa
- Hannu Koivula, expert by experience in informal care, The Association of Carers in Helsinki and Vantaa

## Links to the different sources mentioned in the guide

- LOTTA checklist for successful medication (in Finnish). Eight questions to help you determine whether your medication is in order:  
[https://fimea.fi/documents/147152901/159465518/Lotta\\_kyse\\_lylomake\\_FINAL.pdf](https://fimea.fi/documents/147152901/159465518/Lotta_kyse_lylomake_FINAL.pdf)
- The Terveyskirjasto health library maintained by the Finnish Medical Society Duodecim contains information about the treatments and medicinal treatments of illnesses:  
[www.terveyskirjasto.fi](http://www.terveyskirjasto.fi) (In Finnish)
- The Current Care Guidelines for patients drawn up by the Finnish Medical Society Duodecim:  
<https://www.kaypahoito.fi/en/>
- The portal maintained by the Association of Finnish Pharmacies. The portal contains advice on self-care, information about the prices of medicines and about pharmacy services, and a template for drawing up the list of medicines: [www.apteekki.fi](http://www.apteekki.fi) (In Finnish)
- The drug guide in the Terveyskirjasto health library maintained by the Pharmaceutical Information Centre contains information about medicinal products:  
<https://www.terveyskirjasto.fi/sisalto/laakeopas>
- Kela's website with information on reimbursements for medicines:  
<https://www.kela.fi/medicine-expenses>
- Kela's Medicinal Products Database in which you can search for information about prices and reimbursement:  
[https://asiointi.kela.fi/laakekys\\_app/LaakekysApplication?kieli=en](https://asiointi.kela.fi/laakekys_app/LaakekysApplication?kieli=en)
- The Finnish Medicines Agency Fimea's public website, which contains information about the appropriate use of medicines: [https://fimea.fi/en/for\\_public](https://fimea.fi/en/for_public)
- The Medicines Education Portal maintained by the Finnish Medicines Agency Fimea includes basic information on medicines:  
<https://www.tervekoululainen.fi/en/home/medicineseducation/medicines-education-collaboration/>
- Lääketalo (House of medicine), developed and produced by the Finnish university hospital districts in the Health Village service contains information about medication, the appropriate use of medicines and problem situations:  
<https://www.terveyskyla.fi/laaketalo/> (In Finnish)



## Instructions for the safe use of medicines

- The Facebook site Tunne lääkkeesi (Know your medicines) maintained by the National Medicines Information Network distributes information on medicines:  
<https://www.facebook.com/tunnelaakkeesi/>
- Suomi.fi Web Service, through which you can give an electronic mandate for acting on your behalf at a pharmacy: <https://www.suomi.fi/e-authorizations>